

*RURAL YOUTH EUROPE*

# Annual Report 2015

Rural  
youth  
europe

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Rural  
youth  
europe

Dear friends of Rural Youth Europe,

It is my honour to present you with the annual report for Rural Youth Europe 2015. I hope you enjoy reading about the numerous activities Rural Youth Europe hosted and participated in. Those of you who have been to one or more of those events will hopefully find this report a nice reminder of the experience you made with Rural Youth Europe.

It is my particular pleasure to announce a first amongst Rural Youth Europe's activities in 2015. The newly launched Junior Event targets the youngsters of our member organisations and offers new opportunities to engage that part of our diverse membership. "Set Up Your Future" was the title of our first Junior event and attracted 12 enthusiastic youngsters and with the strong support of our Swedish 4H member organisation, it became a huge success.

A very warm welcome goes to NBU (Norges Bygdeungdomslag) the Norwegian Young Farmers. We are very happy you joined us as a new member of Rural Youth Europe. We are convinced that we have gained with you a new and active organisation that fits excellently to the network of Rural Youth Europe and we all looking forward to a prosperous cooperation.

My gratitude also goes to Rural Youth Austria and to ZSPM our Slovenian member organisation for hosting an outstanding Rally and a fabulous Autumn Seminar. The prep teams of these events including the Study Session in Strasbourg that was hosted together with MIJARC, have provide great learning and networking opportunities.

Big thanks goes also to our past board members Russel Carrington and Zane Steinberga. They have shown an enormous amount of dedication in their respective positions and had a great impact on the work of Rural Youth Europe. To Paddy Delaney and Kätlin Merisalu as newly elected board members at the GA 2015 I can only express my best wishes and say that it already has been a pleasure to work with you. Further, we welcomed Jenni Heinonen who is taking over the daily business during the maternity leave of Pia Nurmio-Perälä. With particular dedication, she has proved already, that we have been very fortunate to find such a very capable and enthusiastic interim Secretary General.

Rural Youth Europe owes a special gratitude to the European Youth Foundation of the Directorate of Youth and Sports of the Council of Europe, the Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Union, the programme "Erasmus+", and of course sponsors from the Member Organisation's countries for their continued support which is so vital to organisations such as ours.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you who participated in the events of Rural Youth Europe. The time and effort every single one of you give to be a part of our network is the most important resource to make our activities great experiences and learning opportunities for all who attended them.

Yours sincerely,

Lukas Helfenstein

Chairman,

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The logo for Rural Youth Europe, featuring the words "Rural Youth Europe" in a stylized, purple, sans-serif font. The word "Rural" is stacked above "Youth", which is stacked above "Europe". The letters are bold and have a slight shadow effect.

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## 1 BOARD AND SECRETARIAT

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Chairman</b>                                 | <b>Lukas Helfenstein</b> (Switzerland)  |
| <b>Vice-Chairman</b>                            | <b>Linda Medne</b> (Latvia)   |
| <b>Board Member UK and Ireland (Group I)</b>    | <b>Russell Carrington</b> (England)<br>1.1.2015 – 6.8.2015<br><br><b>Paddy Delaney</b> (Ireland)<br>6.8.15 – 31.12.2015 |
| <b>Board Member Central Europe (Group II)</b>   | <b>Sebastian Lassnig</b> (Austria)  |
| <b>Board Member Northern Europe (Group III)</b> | <b>Mikko Välitälo</b> (Finland)   |
| <b>Board Member Eastern Europe (Group IV)</b>   | <b>Zane Steinberga</b> (Latvia)<br>1.1.2015 – 6.8.2015<br><br><b>Kätlin Merisalu</b> (Estonia)<br>6.8.2015 – 31.12.2015 |
| <b>Secretary General</b>                        | <b>Pia Nurmio-Perälä</b> (Finland)  |
| Interim Secretary General                       | <b>Jenni Heinonen</b> (Finland)<br>17.8.2015 – 31.12.2015   |

## 2 MEMBERS

Contacts with the Rural Youth Europe (RYEurope) Member Organisations are maintained through statutory meetings and events. The RYEurope webpage, social media, monthly e-news, e-mail, phone and Skype are used to keep up the cooperation between meetings. If there is an opportunity or specific reason, Member Organisations are visited by Board Members or the Secretary General.

### GROUP I



#### **National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC)**

YFC Centre, 10th street, Stoneleigh Park,  
Kenilworth CV8 2LG, UK (England)

[www.nfyfc.org.uk](http://www.nfyfc.org.uk)

(17855 members)



#### **Macra na Feirme**

Irish Farmcentre Bluebell, 12 Dublin, Ireland

[www.macra.ie](http://www.macra.ie)

(5517 members)



#### **Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster (YFCU)**

475 Antrim Road, BT15 3BD Belfast, UK (N.Ireland)

[www.yfcu.org](http://www.yfcu.org)

(3027 members)



#### **Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs (SAYFC)**

Ingliston Young Farmers' Centre, EH28 8NE,  
Edinburgh, UK (Scotland)

[www.sayfc.org](http://www.sayfc.org)

(3500 members)



#### **Wales YFC / CFFI Cymru**

CFFI, Builth Wells, LD2 3NJ, Powys, UK (Wales)

[www.yfc-wales.org.uk](http://www.yfc-wales.org.uk)

(5128 members)

**GROUP II****Landjugend Österreich (ÖLJ)**

Schauflegasse 6, 1014 Wien, Austria

[www.landjugend.at](http://www.landjugend.at) (90000 members)

**Bund der Deutschen Landjugend (BDL)**

Claire-Waldoff-Str. 7, 10117, Berlin, Germany

[www.landjugend.de](http://www.landjugend.de) (100000 members)

**Agricultural and Rural Youth Association (AGRYA)**

Váci út 134/c, VI/28, 1138, Budapest, Hungary

[www.agrya.hu](http://www.agrya.hu)

**Slovenian Rural Youth (ZSPM)**

Celovska 43, 1000, Ljubljana, Slovenia

[www.zspm.si](http://www.zspm.si) (3683 members)

**Schweizerische Landjugendvereinigung (SLJV)**

c/o AGRIDEA, Eschikon 28, 8315, Lindau, Switzerland

[www.landjugend.ch](http://www.landjugend.ch) (2869 members)

**GROUP III****Danmarks Landbougdom + Danish 4H**

Agro Food Park 15, Skejby, 8200, Aarhus N, Denmark

[www.landbougdom.dk](http://www.landbougdom.dk)[www.4h.dk](http://www.4h.dk)

(8211 members)

**Suomen 4H-liitto**

Karjalankatu 2A, 00520 Helsinki, Finland

[www.4h.fi](http://www.4h.fi)

(64933 members)

**Finlands Svenska 4H**

Elisabetsgatan 21 B 12, FIN-00170, Helsinki, Finland

[www.fs4h.fi](http://www.fs4h.fi)

(4046 members)

**4H Norge**

Postboks 113, N-2026 Skjetten, Norway

[www.4h.no](http://www.4h.no)

(13536 members)

**Norges Bygdeungdomslag**Schweigaardsgate 34B, oppgang 2, 3. etasje,  
Grønland, Oslo, Norway[www.nbu.no](http://www.nbu.no)

(7673 members)

**Sveriges 4H**

Box 2012, 64102, Katrineholm Sweden

[www.4h.se](http://www.4h.se)

**GROUP IV****Eesti 4H**

Allika 2a, 80036, Pärnu, Estonia

[www.eesti4h.ee](http://www.eesti4h.ee)

(1018 members)

**Latvian 4H**

Ezermalas 28, LV-1014, Riga, Latvia

[www.mazpulki.lv](http://www.mazpulki.lv)

(239 members)

**Latvian Young Farmer's Club (JZK)**Latvijas Jauno Zemnieku klubs, Dobeles iela 41A,  
LV-3001, Jelgava, Latvia[www.jzk.lv](http://www.jzk.lv)

(93 members)

Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej  
Rok założenia 1928**Polish Rural Youth Union**

Nowy Świat 19 lok. 17, 00-029, Warsaw, Poland

[www.zmw.pl](http://www.zmw.pl)Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie  
na Rzecz Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich**WSnRROW****Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Rozwoju Obszarów  
Organization for Development of Rural Areas in Poland**

Skrzynka 28 62-402 Ostrowite, Poland

[www.wsnrrow.pl](http://www.wsnrrow.pl)



## 3 STATUTORY MEETINGS

### 3.1 General Assembly

**6th August 2015**

**Linz, Austria**

The Rural Youth Europe General Assembly (GA) 2015 was held at a very warm day, the 6th of August, in Linz, Austria. 21 delegates, the Rural Youth Europe board and some support staff were present.

The board of Rural Youth Europe has during the last year discussed much about how to develop the organisation so it would better meet the needs of the member organisations and the modern society. This was the background of the GA workshops. One workshop was about membership benefits in general and the other two were about junior activities and conferences. The last mentioned was about a totally new concept where key persons in the organisations, staff and board members meet to exchange good praxis, develop skills or discuss relevant policies. The GA delegates warmly welcomed this idea and together worked on directions for further planning. A pilot junior event was held in Sweden during spring 2015 and the GA workshop on this topic was about how to overcome challenges that comes with involving minors in international events and in general to measure the interest in such events.

The GA itself was held in the afternoon with reports for the past year and plans for the next, elections, financials and member issues. Praxis about paying travel reimbursement for events was changed so in the future, whenever possible, will be paid soon after the activity. A highlight of the GA was welcoming Norwegian Rural Youth as new members of Rural Youth Europe and to get to know them better.

### 3.2 Board Meetings

The Board of RYEurope implements the decisions and policies accepted at General Assemblies, monitors the financial situation, takes care of the staff, and prepares and evaluates the international activities of the organisation. Throughout 2015 nine board meetings were held: four virtually via Skype and five face-to-face.

In the first meeting on **February 9<sup>th</sup>** via **Skype**, discussed issues were:

- documents (Communication Strategy and Membership benefits);
- events (board was updated about preparations for Junior event “Set Your Future” in Finland);
- Rural Youth Project of the Year 2014 competition results;

- European Youth Forum (COMEM and Extraordinary General Assembly, which was assigned to vice-chairperson Linda Medne. Board also made a decision to have a candidate to run on the election for Advisors' Council nomination, which would be chosen according to his/her skills and knowledge)
- IT and communications (new format for business cards and certificates was accepted)
- Offers to participate in other projects were revised: Rural Youth Europe is preliminary partners of the European Our Soil project coordinated by Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES).

First physical meeting on **March 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>** was held in **Edinburgh**, Scotland. Meeting had two parts: board meeting itself and meeting with Scottish Associations of Young Farmers' Clubs. In the meeting with SAYFC board was updated about situation in the organisation and informed about main conditions about participating in Junior event.

In board meeting apart from adopting the minutes of previous meetings, having updates for coming events and listening to regional reports, board discussed and agreed on several things:

- Randa Medne (chairperson of Latvian 4H Club) was selected as Rural Youth Europe's nominee for Advisory Board Member for European Commission.
- Mikko Väitalo (Group III representative) would coordinate the building process of Communication Strategy.
- By making short promotion movies and publishing posts in social media, benefits of being a part of RYEurope should be communicated to member and potential organisations.
- In order to promote Rural Youth Project of the Year, application form would be made shorter and more youthful.
- Not to renew the contract with Otto Kronqvist, and to make a call for open office assistant position.
- Each of board members would have a presentation and a workshop to lead at GA.
- Board would meet Signe Lindbåten, Secretary General of Rural Youth Norway, 9 March 2015 in Oslo, Norway, to tell about Rural Youth Europe and how to proceed with membership application
- The Board agreed to become partner in the TeaTimeForSoil project, on the condition that Rural Youth Europe is involved only by facilitating some tea bag tests together with participants at activities.
- Linda Medne (vice-chairperson) will participate in European Youth Forum's COMEM 16-19 April 2015 and also in the storytelling workshop that continues until 22 April.
- [www.ruralyouth europe.com](http://www.ruralyouth europe.com) website would be developed, and Google Analytics would be set up to provide a better understanding of how it is used.
- The Board members would write blog posts and help finding external bloggers so the blog could go online by the end of March 2015. The blog would be placed at the Rural Youth Europe webpage.

- The topic of the annual work plan 2015 is young people's transfer to work life, that should be a thread also in the 2015 magazines. The magazine would keep a similar format as in 2014.
- Finnish 4H Club asked evaluation of Behavioural Guidance that should be considered in near future.
- Next face-to-face board meeting would be held on April 26<sup>th</sup>, Austria.

On **April 26<sup>th</sup>** in **Bad Schallerbach, Austria** most of the debate was raised about RYEurope's participation in platform called European Youth Forum (YFJ). Board agreed to have more use of YFJ membership and to set a strategy how to participate and network at YFJ events. One of the Board members would need to be responsible for YFJ issues.

It could be relevant also for Rural Youth Europe to organise such a story telling workshop as it would involve the member organisations in a good way and it could give the organisation relevant promotion material. It might be relevant to organise this as a separate event, as a Junior event, as part of a possible conference, or as extra days in connection to some other activities.

Practical arrangements and GA workshops was on the agenda as well. and topics for workshops were discussed. The present Board members agreed having a Skype board meeting in June or beginning of July to discussed the General Assembly workshops. As agreed on the previous meeting, the workshops are:

- Development of Junior Event, Mikko Väitalo (Group III representative) responsible, Zane Steinberga (Group IV representative) assists
- Membership/participation benefits, Russell Carrington (Group I representative) responsible, Lukas Helfenstein (Chairperson) assists
- Conference concept, Sebastian Lassnig (Group II representative) responsible, Linda Medne (vice-chairperson) assists.

Second virtual meeting was on **June 11<sup>th</sup>** via **Skype**. Main points on the agenda were:

- Promotion video. Russell Carrington (Group I representative) and Sebastian Lassnig (Group II representative) would film material for the promotional video during the Rally.
- Programme, agenda and practical arrangements for GA. Board agreed that programme would start with a tour of the meeting venue in Linz, coffee, workshops and regional meetings. The lunch would be served at a restaurant near the meeting venue and the General Assembly is held in the afternoon. Russell and Zane are responsible for calculating votes during the General Assembly. Board would remind member organisations from group IV that elections are coming and encourage to nominate.
- Rural Youth Project of the Year. The format for applying should be friendlier and easier. Before the Rally Sebastian Lassnig (Group II representative) would develop

new format further and would ask Emma to make a trial voting on Facebook about some fun topic, as preparation for the Rural Youth Project of the Year judging.

- Employment situation. The application deadline for open positions is closed and Lukas Helfenstein (Chairperson) and Linda Medne (vice-chairperson) would read all applications to narrow down the possible candidates. After that by 1<sup>st</sup> of July possible candidates should be invited for an interview.
- Update on project "TeaTime4Soil". In case of approval of the second application, RYEurope should facilitate a test of soil, done with the method of digging down tea bags for three months, at the Rally venue in 2017, as well as participate in a few project meetings.

**August 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> in Lambach, Austria** is the time and date for the meeting that was held during the European Rally 2015. Agenda points were:

- General Assembly 2015. Board agreed on practical arrangements regarding to distribution of votes, board proposals about travel reimbursements, and agenda.
- Study Session 2015. Due to cancelation of one of the preparation team members, board agreed to ask Geoffrey Thomson (YFCU, Northern Ireland) to become Study Session team members because of his active participation at the Study Session 2014 showed that he would be suitable for the task.
- Rural Youth Project of the Year winner 2014 will be announced during farewell party.
- Media. Board agreed on practicalities for promotional video and magazine.
- Next board meetings would be held in autumn via Skype and Stusnäs, Finland.

Via **Skype on September 30<sup>th</sup>** board discussed such agenda points:

- Election rules for board members. Due to questions according to rules of election was raised, issue would be handled and clarified.
- Promotion video. Board agreed on Matthew Stocks offer to take over the task.
- Media. All RYEurope's media channels: website, Facebook, Twitter, Rural Voices magazine, E-news, blog and other social platforms needs further and ongoing improves, Emma Silen (office assistant) would take that as main responsibility.
- Finances. Bookkeeper is still working on update, but funding applications and reports are done and submitted.
- Events. Board was satisfied with Rally 2015. Situation of the coming events – Autumn seminar and Study session – was updated and preparations are going well. Funding information for events of 2016 are due to December.
- Employment issues and Secretariat handover. Pia and Jenni has had a handover meeting in August, several phone consultations and would have further handover meetings in October and November.
- European Youth Forum. Representative for next COMEM would be looked up in near future.

- Next board meeting would take place in Stusnäs, Finland, but the last meeting place would be discussed, options are Riga or Brussels, depending on finances and possibilities to meet with member organisations or partners.

Handover meeting was organised in **Stusnäs, Finland** on **30<sup>th</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup> November**. Considering the good effect of handover meeting form 2014, this year agenda was arranged in a way to have the most of it. Agenda points:

- Minutes of the last meetings. Minutes were revised and agreed to be updated until next board meeting.
- IT and communications. Board agreed on content for the last edition of Rural Voices magazine. Communication Strategy and Social Media Plan was revised, discussed, and adopted. New possible activities online to involve member organisations were considered.
- Rural Youth Project of the Year. Application for the competition was remade, and deadline for applying would be February 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.
- Video project. Board watched first draft of the video and sent comments to Matt. Video is due to the end of the year.
- Junior event. Board discussed situation of UK participants and requirements. Possible solutions were sent to Patrick Delaney (group I representative) to be discussed with member organisations.
- Employment issues. Board was updated on situation about duties of Secretary General handover. Practical arrangements for handling legal issues were discussed and solved. Jenni Heinonen (Interim SG) suggested that she would write her Master's Thesis about RYEurope and thus help the board to develop Strategy for the organisation.
- Workplan and Calendar. Aims and goals stated at Workplan were revised and next steps for fulfilling it were defined. Board agreed to go on with Calendar that is provided by Google. Role division was revised and each board member had it's responsibility.
- Finances. Estimate financial plan was presented and it showed several thousands of surplus. RYEurope can have 2000 euros profit, but no more due to legal issues. Several options were discussed and board agreed to raise this issue at GA, due to a fact that it would be needed in long term.
- Member issues. Regional board members reported on situation in their areas of responsibility. Issues raised by members, such as funding for Rally, calculation of fees, distribution of GA voting cards were discussed. Next steps to be taken were agreed.
- Events. Due to audit from CoE during Autumn seminar, board agreed to have one more board/staff member to be present. Responsibilities for such 2016 future events as Study session, Rally, and Autumn seminars were divided. Possible hosts and topics for 2017 events were discussed.

- Potential membership. Board was updated in current situation in potential membership: organisations from Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Südtirol, Ukraine have shown the interest. Board would further investigate the interest until meeting in December.
- Documents. Such documents as Charter, Membership Guidelines and Procedure MO application should be revised and/or invented. Responsibilities for leading working groups were divided.
- RYEurope Conference. A new concept for an event was accepted by GA delegates. Possible time and place for the conference would be autumn 2017 in Eastern Europe. Topics suggested by GA would be taken into account.
- Meetings. Board didn't agree on taking part in meetings, but agreed to follow up. Meeting that were discussed: Future Farmer Movement (hosted by Forum Synergy) and European Rural Conference.
- European Youth Forum. Lukas Helfenstein (Chairperson) would attend the COMEM and discuss possible cooperation with MIJARC.
- Next board meeting would take place in Riga, end of December.

In the last **Skype** meeting on **November 27<sup>th</sup>** most of the discussions were about European Youth Foundation and its requirements to have future funding. In conversation with representative from EYF, one issue was raised: RYEurope should revise the flow of the events. There should be parts connecting one activity to another to have better flow. Several possible solutions were made.

Second point in agenda was finances. Board was still proceeding with ways to handle the surplus and investigating the reasons for that. Next board meeting would take place in Riga, December 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Riga, Latvia** meeting on **December 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>** was the last meeting in 2015, but it had numerous points on agenda:

- Role division. Patrick Delaney (group I representative) was introduced with his responsibilities.
- RYEurope Conference. Concept of the event was discussed more detailed. Board agreed to contact Estonian 4H and ask to host the event.
- Documents. Board was updated on situation with work on Charter, Membership Guidelines, Procedure MO application. Further work would be done.
- GA 2016. Board agreed on documents to present at GA and to propose the need for additional board member. Board discussed possible preparation team for Rally 2016.
- Video project. Board was updated on current situation.
- Finances. Regarding the situation, surplus would be still expected, but there are several invoices to be paid that will reduce the amount. Board agreed to have a new contract with bookkeeper to have better access to accounts.

- Events. Board game that was created in Study session would be produced as soon as tested. 2016 events – board representative for Study Session would be Kätlin Merisalu (group IV representative). Erasmus + funding for Junior event was rejected, options for re-applying or organising event on other funding would be discussed with Finnish 4H. An update for Rally was presented by Geoffrey Thomson (YFCU, Northern Ireland). Norwegian 4H sent update on Autumn Seminar. Possible hosts for Rally 2018 were considered.
- Member issues. Regional reports were given.
- Potential members. Regional members has ongoing communication with organisations. Update would be given in next board meetings.
- IT and communications. Update on current situation was given
- Employment issues. Possible extra hours of work for an office assistant were discussed. Chairperson and Vice-chairperson would have monthly Skype with SG on office situation, and SG would have monthly Skype with Graphical Designer and Office Assistant.
- Rural Youth Project of the Year 2015. Published, advertised, going according to plan. Good feedback on new system has been received.
- Board game. Board agreed o several practicalities regarding the board game, such as printing, format and use of it.
- Meetings. CoSi project was introduced by Jenni. Discussion on how we benefit from the project and whether we would need to attend all meetings and who would go.
- European Youth Forum. In order to have a stronger voice in YFJ, board would suggest to GA to have an additional board member for these purposes. Stronger cooperation with MIJARC should be established.
- Next board meeting would be held in February Sweden and May Poland or Hungary.

### 3.3 Secretariat

The office of RYEurope is located in Helsinki, Finland at the address Karjalankatu 2A, 00520 Helsinki, Finland.

The office has one full-time staff member as Secretary General and one part time employed Office Assistant and Graphic Designer. From the beginning of the year until October RYEurope's Secretary General was Pia Nurmio-Perälä, from October 11th Pia took maternal leave and interim Secretary General Jenni Heinonen started working.

From the beginning of the year until May Otto Kronkvist was employed as Media and Communications Coordinator. From August and for the rest of the year Emma Silén started working as part time Media and Communication Coordinator.

Julia Hentz (located in Hungary) was employed to do layout and design for the Rural Voices magazine and several graphical design tasks.

Bookkeeping service was provided by Kirsi Korpaeus from Finnish 4H.

## 4 EVENTS

### 4.1 Junior Event 2015

The Junior Event “Set Up Your Future“ was arranged in Ästad 4H-gård, Sweden during Easter. The theme was employment and dealt with what youngsters can do to stand out e.g. when applying for a job.

The first day consisted of teambuilding activities, as well as sessions about setting SMART goals and discovering different learning styles. In the evening there was a creative fashion show where participants made dresses out of recycled material and dressed up as a national hero or character from their home country. During the second day different ways of communication was discussed e.g. through a body language monitoring exercise and presentation skills.

During the last day work life guidance was on the agenda. Sessions about writing a good CV and preparing for a job interview were implemented with good results. After an evaluation session it was time for final dinner.

One of the most important outcomes of the event was gained confidence among the participants; confidence to apply for a job and know what rights one has, confidence to stand up and have a presentation and confidence to travel abroad and use English, which was not a native language for anyone of the participants.

### 4.2 European Rally 2015

European Rally 2015 “Work hand in hand. Create your land” took place on 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of August in Lambach, Austria. It gathered 80 participants from member organisations, and 10 full team members from 6 countries and 14 local helpers and workshop leaders.

The aim of the event was to raise young people’s awareness of rural worklife and ways to keep the countryside vivid. Objectives arised from the aim was to learn about and try on rural traditional and modern work employment and entrepreneurship possibilities; get insight in the work life from the employers’ perspective; share how volunteer action meet needs and add to the social aspects of the rural community; understand the value of recreation services and other facilities needed to complement the work life in rural areas; get inspired by creative entrepreneurship and innovative farming and reflect on their role in running the community; teach each other relevant skills and support each other to take action for a vivid European countryside.

Week started with getting to know each other, understanding the activity content, and setting personal learning goals. As the week went on participants developed skills that are useful for being an active citizen in rural areas, especially regarding work issues. Participants studied



local reality regarding education and work issues –comparing with the situations in the sending organisation. Learning about project management theory and practice, to in an effective way make impact in rural areas and trying on the rural reality by living and working at a local family for a day took place latter on the week. By the end of the event participants explored what else than work opportunities are needed to keep the countryside vivid, like nature, culture, services, hobbies and reflecting on what of this would be needed to develop in the home communities. European Rally 2015 was wrapped up by final evaluation, but daily reflections, discovery times and evening programmes took place all through week.

Event had the function of gathering a large group of rural youth and making them, as representatives of their organisations, aware of the education and work situation in rural areas and motivated them to take action for keeping the countryside vivid. Such things as intercultural surrounding, which seldom is the reality in rural areas; and English as working language, which was a challenge for some – was new for most of the participants.

Instead, most participants were familiar to the theme of rural community and work life regarding their own home community. This brought the group together and it was quite easy to overcome the challenges of working in a new surrounding. Participants mentioned many times during the programme that they notice a lot of differences between the countries, but in the end, the rural challenges are the similar all over. Therefore the participants also had many opportunities to share good practice and bring new ideas home. Some of these ideas were written down and collected, and will be published on the Rural Youth Europe webpage during the autumn 2015.

### **4.3 Study Session 2015**

In October 2015, the Study Session was held in cooperation with MIJARC in Strasbourg at the Youth centre of Council of Europe. The theme of the study session was creation of sustainable rural work opportunities and the competences young people have in order to be able to create work in their communities and for themselves.

Decreasing need of work force in traditional rural fields, together with the recent financial crises, have hit hard on the rural employment situation and the options are few on the small communities' labour market. This has an especially hard impact on youth who are searching for first work opportunities.

This study session mainly contributed to the Council of Europe's working priority 3: "Education and training contribute to young people's autonomy and a better transition from education to working life/labour market".

It was relevant for Rural Youth Europe and MIJARC Europe, as two rural organisations, to work on this topic together, as our young people meet the same challenges. Even if we are both rural, we have different basic priorities, structure, geographical scope and activities, the cooperation was enriching for both parts and for our participants. Our organisations can hopefully bring a new point of view on rural work issues to the Council of Europe.

#### 4.4 Autumn Seminar 2015

“Brand me New” was the autumn Seminar of Rural Youth Europe. It was organised in cooperation with Zveza slovenske podeželske mladine (ZSPM) and held in Koroska Region in Slovenia from 7th-14th November 2016.

34 participants travelled to Slovenia, all with different dreams and goals and all of them had different personal expectations and hopes in their luggage. Some were looking for personal growth and time to reflect upon who they are - hoping that sessions like “public speaking” and “make yourself visible in the crowd” could help them on their way. Others were searching methods that can be used for personal promotion and branding and were looking forward to sessions such as “visual presentation” and “communicating your competences”. And of course, everyone was looking forward to the intercultural communication, wondering what interesting knowledge it would give them to bring back home.

The first day started with a rise and shine energiser to waken everyone up and create a lot of enthusiasm. An introduction to what the week will include was given and then the program kicked officially off with a first group work. The participants were split into groups to think about their fears, hopes and expectations of the week ahead. Following that, the participants started with presenting their homework and the videos they have prepared about themselves. The day concluded with team building activities and an international buffet, where the participants became overwhelmed of all the various tastes from all the specialties that every participant brought from their home countries.

The activities over the next few days related to the seminars topic which included video presentations of life goals and how participants can hope to achieve them. As group work participant discussed their favourite websites and advertisement and evaluated these to decide upon what they valued most from each individual website and advert. Other daily activities included how to write a CV, how to stand out from the crowd, interview preparation and techniques and how public speaking is vital in everyday life.

Experts and quest who joined the seminar for some sessions were not just an opportunity to get first-hand information, but were also an exciting addition to the packed program. A representative from the European Youth Foundation gave an exciting presentation about their work and the Council of Europe where everyone could learn a lot of new aspects. The Slovenian Wine Queen was telling about her experiences and how her role as wine queen has expanded her overall image and further, an expert interviewer was invited to the seminar and gave some guidelines on what to do for an interview to really make each individual different.

One evening’s activities included farming games, typical of the Slovenian culture. Another evening was a carnival night where everyone dressed up for the occasion. A local folklore group from the Kurents who were dressed up in a sheep costume, which were decorated by large cowbells, showed some traditional dances.

The program included also study trips to different farms. Each farm was fairly small and need to diversify to increase their revenue. One of the farms made cheeses and also had a

wellness spa build into the B&B accommodation to increase their profits to become fully self-sustainable. Others were vineyards where everyone learned the inspiring stories about the farm's history and how they market themselves to run a successful business. The day ended with a short trip to the Maribor Wine Festival. After a personal welcome from the Mayor of the city of Maribor everyone got to experience the traditional culture, history and wine from the various stands on a tour around the city and festival.

When asked what the biggest outcome has been to the attendees, the general answer from all of them is cultural knowledge. Every day something new was learned about each other's countries, ways of life, attitudes and more. A greater understanding of how branding, farming, and self-promotion is used throughout Europe has been formed, and many new friendships have been established. New understandings have come to life, and everyone left inspired and full of hope for the future, with new ideas and invaluable memories.

## **5 EXTERNAL RELATION**

### **5.1 Council of Europe**

RYEurope maintained good working relations with the Directorate of Youth and Sports (DYS) of the Council of Europe.

### **5.2 European Youth Foundation**

The European Youth Foundation (EYF) of the Council of Europe provided grants for general administrative expenses and for the work plan 2015. Activities that were included in Work plan: Junior event “Set Up your Future”, Halland, Sweden; European Rally “Work Hand in Hand, Create your Land”, Lambach, Austria; Autumn Seminar “Brand Me New” Maribor, Slovenia; Study Session “Unveiling Rural Realities, Unlocking Youth Potential” in Strasbourg, France,

Grant covered three editions of the magazine “Rural Voices” and production of board game “Jobopoly”.

### **5.3 European Youth Centres**

The European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest are residential centres of the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) of the Council of Europe. International non-governmental youth organisations can apply to hold study sessions there. In 2015 RYEurope held in cooperation with MIJARC a study session at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg with the title “Unveiling Rural Realities, Unlocking Youth Potential”.

### **5.4 European Union**

In 2015, RYEurope benefited from the Erasmus+ programme through an operational grant.

### **5.5 European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)**

CEJA is a partner organisation of RYEurope, mainly dealing with agricultural issues and policies on a European level. They lobby the European Commission on behalf of young farmers in Europe.

## **5.6 European Youth Forum (YFJ)**

RYEurope is a member of the European Youth Forum (YFJ), which is an organisation uniting 100 National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations. YFJ works through its various bodies, commissions and task forces towards the European Union, Council of Europe, United Nations and other policy makers to promote issues affecting young Europeans.

Representatives from RYEurope attended the following YFJ events and meetings in 2015:

- Council of Members Meeting (COMEM), Brussels, Belgium in April 2015.  
Attended by Linda Medne (Vice-Chair) and Randa Medne.
- Council of Members Meeting (COMEM) and General Assembly, in November 2015 in Madrid, Spain.  
Attended by Lukas Helfenstein (Chairman).
- CELAC-EU Youth Days: Decent Employment, April 2015.  
Attended by Elin Hofström.

Further RYEurope nominate Randa Medne as a candidate for the elections of the “Advisory Council on Youth”.

RYEurope representatives were able to actively lobby for the interests of youth in rural areas in the context of European Youth Policy at these meetings. Discussions on rural youth issues with Youth Forum Bureau members have also taken place at other European events.

As an important step, the board of RYEurope decided in the end of 2014 to make more use of the opportunities and become more active within the framework of the YFJ for the future. In specific RYEurope wants to actively participate in the Structure Dialog in 2016.

## **5.7 International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth (MIJARC)**

MIJARC is a Catholic Rural Youth Organisation mainly represented in the western and southern parts of Europe. In 2015, RYEurope and MIJARC held its common study session to at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg.

## **5.8 European IFYE Alumni Association**

International Farm Youth Exchanges (IFYE) arrange exchange programmes on farms for rural young people. The exchanges last for 1-6 months with alternating different rural host families in another country. The programme involves Europe and also the USA, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Taiwan, Costa Rica and several other countries.

Good relations have been maintained with IFYE and approximately 100 participants from our member organisations benefit from the exchange programme every year.

## **5.9 European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC)**

European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) is a European network of youth work and youth club organisations that practice and promote open youth work and non-formal learning. RYEurope and ECYC have regularly cooperated at study sessions.

## **5.10 Youth Express Network (Y-E-N)**

Youth Express Network (Y-E-N) is a European network for non-governmental youth organisations working on inclusion and human rights issues. RYEurope and Y-E-N has regularly cooperated at study sessions. In 2015 Y-E-N and RYEurope prepared the common study session in 2016 with the title “Unveiling Rural Realities, Unlocking Youth Potential”.

## **5.11 European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA)**

The European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA) brings together European civil organisations, which are involved in the integrated and multi-sectorial rural development. RYEurope started a partnership with ERA in 2010.

## **5.12 Forum Synergies**

Forum Synergies is a European non-profit organisation, which aims at gathering, reinforcing and spreading sustainable practices, mainly in rural areas. RYEurope participated in a “Rural Youth & Young Farmers Workshop” of “Future Farmers Movement” to network and exchange with new organisation and key persons.

### **5.13 Other Rural Youth Organisations**

Curba de Cultură (Romania) and Rural Vizija (Macedonia) have established preliminary contact with RYEurope regarding possible cooperation or membership.

Effort is also set to Rural Youth Tyrol (Italy) and Plattelands Jongeren (Netherlands), who are potential member organisations and would fit perfectly to the membership of Rural Youth Europe.

## 6 **RURAL YOUTH PROJECT OF THE YEAR COMPETITION**

Three month ago we announced the winner of the Rural Youth Europe project competition 2015. This year the winner is Landjugend (Rural Youth Club) St. Oswald/Eibiswald from Austria.

New evaluation procedure:

The board decided to change the evaluation process of the competition. The focus here was set on the following three points: 1. To make the application process simpler. 2. To get a better understanding of the project and what really happened, and 3. To give the best projects a much higher public visibility. After restructuring, the solution was to have less written questions and an automated presentation/video of the project instead. Furthermore after the internal evaluation by the board the three best projects went into a public voting. We wanted to have the opinion/vote of our MO's as well included as we believe that the final decision should be made by our members.

Not only the evaluation procedure, as well was the prize was pimped up. Two places at the Junior Event (if the winners are under aged) or at the European Rally, worth 1500€.



## **7 MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**

### **7.1 Rural Voices magazine**

The three editions of the Rural Youth Europe magazine named “Rural Voices” were published in June, September and December. The magazine has an interactive approach as it contains many short articles and news from the member organisations. Rural Voices contains also reports on RYEurope activities, the international and national activities of Member Organisations and topics of general interest: young people living in the countryside, European youth policy, information on funding possibilities, general European issues, etc.

### **7.2 Website**

The webpage [www.ruralyoutheurope.com](http://www.ruralyoutheurope.com) provides information about the organisation itself, future and past activities as well as news from RYEurope member organisations, partner organisations and other organisations working in the youth field. The website is updated at least weekly with new items and photos. New to the website is the newly launched blog of Rural Youth Europe, which is integrated into the website.

### **7.3 E-Newsletter**

The E-newsletter of RYEurope is published and sent out on a monthly basis and is an important communication tool to update members and partners with the latest news. The newsletter provides up-to-date information about different trainings and activities of RYEurope, member organisations, partner organisations and other organisations working in the youth field.

### **7.4 Blog**

The blog aims to give young people in rural parts of Europe an opportunity to share their stories and experiences. During the whole year around one post per month was published. The posts told about international experiences or success stories from young entrepreneurs. Authors of blog posts were volunteers. The most popular blog posts had over 1'000 readers.

## 7.5 Social Media

Rural Youth Europe has been visible on several social media platforms. Most activity has taken place on Facebook, but Twitter as well as Instagram are also used. During 2015 Rural Youth Europe opened an account on Instagram and decided to use the hashtag #ruralyoutheuropa. Facebook has been the main source of sharing information, while Instagram has been more used to share moments from the events. Twitter is used mostly by members from Group 1, which makes it more challenging to reach all potential.

## 7.6 Further actions

The RYEurope Board and Secretariat completed its a Communications' Strategy to have a more strategic approach of how representatives of the organisation communicate its messages.

During 2015 RYEurope did filming at events and interviewed participants. With the collected video material, a promotion video about RYEurope was created. The final video will be launched in beginning of 2016.

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Rural Youth Europe is supported by:

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