

IDEA SUBMISSION

THEME:

- Digital health
- Rural tourism recovery

TEAM NUMBER (mandatory):

8

TEAM NAME (mandatory): **Rural Roots Network**

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SHORT SUMMARY (MAX. 500 CHARACTERS) (optional):

Rural Roots Network is a digital platform for sustainable tourism, connecting environmentally conscious consumers with rural entrepreneurs who want to contribute to climate adaptation in the North Atlantic. Users will browse vouchers for future outings in rural landscapes, a portion of each sale invested in on-farm climate proofing. Meanwhile, the consumer will enjoy artisan goods and the satisfaction of contributing to a farm's sustainability mission as they anticipate an unforgettable visit.

EXPANDED DESCRIPTION (max 5 pages) (optional):

Introduction

Rural livelihoods are increasingly dependent on income from tourists, however the current tourism model is damaging to the health of the environment that rural communities rely on.

Rural tourism is an economic sector involving several stakeholder groups in Nordic countries. Many farmers only work part time in tourism, supplementing agriculture in a mixed farming system. While the industry is growing, several challenges remain. The 2020 Nordregio “Planning for sustainable tourism in the Nordic region” report identified increasing profitability and investment, environmental concerns, lack of infrastructure, and the seasonality of the tourism season as key problems to address for the future of rural tourism in the Nordic region.

Annual tourism numbers have increased sharply in certain destinations and tourism pressure on the natural environment and infrastructure has increased in parallel, as have CO2 emissions from intercontinental travel. However, as the Covid-19 pandemic essentially halted global tourism, it has given the whole industry occasion to rethink the premises upon which recent development has been built.

In this context, sustainability has become an important focus for the tourism industry, aiming to find a suitable balance between economic, sociocultural and environmental aspects. However, some ask the question as to whether sustainable tourism is truly possible, as this industry is increasingly reliant on high impact activities, such as air travel.

The **Rural Roots Network** initiative aims to address the conflict between tourism and sustainability. It combines existing strategies from three proven models: AirBnB, GoFundMe and ‘voluntourism’. Through our platform, travellers can fund small rural hospitality/farming businesses implementing initiatives focused on improving their sustainability. The platform will work on a suggested donation tier basis, where the receiving business offers goods bundles in return for different donation amounts. Tiered donations is an established fundraising method where and is shown to increase the average contribution by about 12%.

For example, imagine a small business owner in the Scottish Highlands is interested in installing solar panels to reduce their carbon footprint. She posts her story on the **Rural Roots Network**, offering home-made jumpers and night stays at the farm BnB as rewards. Interested visitors donate the money, and visit the farm to see the project when they can. When they leave, they receive a hand-made jam from berry bushes they watered themselves and a new link to the countryside.

This model helps to co-create assets and experiences with a sustainability mindset in rural communities, allowing farmers and visitors to learn from each other and create stronger bonds over shared values and experiences.

This will take advantage of the current Covid-19 situation, helping businesses that are struggling getting back on their feet, and giving frustrated travellers something to look forward to. In addition, the business model allows for this idea to be implemented at a small, low-risk scale initially, with a great potential for scaling up in the future.

Business Model

The **Rural Roots Network** team developed a Business Model Canvas (see below), clearly describing the operational inputs and outputs of our company and identifying the target market.

The value proposition for **Rural Roots Network** is to co-create assets and experiences with an eco-friendly mindset in rural communities and as well giving ownership and connectivity between farmers and tourists to a destination.

There are several potential partners for this company, both in the private and public field. A strong asset of this business is the wide range of potential for partners, maximising the potential for matching-funds. **Rural Roots Network** will specifically attract institutions and businesses interested in investing in new ways for agricultural and tourism to interact, promoting communication and shared assets, experiences and ideas. During the initial period, **Rural Roots Network** will rely on [Scottish Government funding](#) aimed at the recovery of the tourism sector, such as the Growth Fund and Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. After establishment, we will seek partnerships in the private sectors, such as with Patagonia, Equinor and Arla foods, as well as municipal tourism boards, to boost our business and expand to other Nordic areas, such as Norway and North America.

To get our platform up and running, the skills of web developers and technical developers will be essential. These will be recruited after the initial funding is secured.

Rural Roots Network is built for rural entrepreneurs and environmentally aware travelers. Farmers seeking opportunities to diversify their income and climate-proof their businesses, will use the website to find interested visitors and investors. Visitors looking for a meaningful experience while travelling to stunning rural locations, can use the platform to find projects to support and plan holidays they will never forget. This model also provide opportunities for small rural enterprises to build new networks outside of their towns. However, it also gives tourists the peace of mind of a sustainable trip, and empowers them to make a tangible difference for the climate at a local scale. Travellers will also have the opportunity to gain knowledge in agricultural and cultural livelihood in rural areas.

The cost structure includes expenses related to customer support, insurance and legal costs, external IT support of services and developers and awareness of marketing costs. These are costs are both fixed and variable in nature, and will vary as the platform expands. The revenue streams that **Rural Roots Network** will rely on are commission fees and fundings from partners.

Business Model Canvas for Rural Roots Network



Figure 1. The analysis of Business Model Canvas for Rural Roots Network.

SDGs Relevance

The **Rural Roots Network** addresses the sustainable recovery of rural tourism in two ways: the effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and the mission of sustainable, green, and healthy development in the long run. It promotes sustainable tourism in accordance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the potential of rural tourism for rural development in terms of economic growth, improved infrastructures, and technology application (Table. 1).

Table. 1 The justifications of SDGs relevance of the **Rural Roots Network**.

SDGs	Justification
Biosphere Climate Action #13 Life on land #15	The environmentally- friendly practices through tree planting, sustainable production will largely mitigate the current climate change problem and bring biodiversity into the rural area.
Society No Poverty #1 Affordable and Clean Energy #7 Sustainable Cities and Communities #11	The promotion of this software can bring fundings and financial benefits as well as the potentials of renewable energy installation and improved infrastructure opportunities, which can help mitigate social concerns in terms of poverty, energy, and community.
Economy Responsible Consumption and Production #12 Reduced Inequalities #10 Decent Work and Economic Growth #8	The increasing job opportunities in rural tourism and encouragement of rural business will boost economic growth and reduce the income gap between urban citizens and rural people.
Partnership Partnerships for the Goals #17	The cooperative partners, potential investors, and government can take this platform as an opportunity to work together on the issue of rural tourism.

Examples of activities

Farmers will provide guidance on suitable projects for funding, however it will be up to them to decide what improvements are required on their farms and what rewards they can offer.

The platform aims to transparently and collaboratively engage among customers and prospective environmental projects in the rural area. These engagements include agroforestry practices, renewable energy installation, and direct transfer with local people. The participation in proposed activities can both be conducted through browsing vouchers, membership fees, or direct donating to give local entrepreneurs, corporate companies, and customers more freedom. Projects with high application probability are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Potential projects for future direction of Rural Root Network.

	Project description	Estimated outputs
	The agroforestry practice is the land management system to introduce trees to other lands. The project with an agroforestry concept can improve tourists engagement with nature through farming activities in selected sites or remotely. The increased participation in agroforestry will benefit the environment in terms of improved soil function, climate change mitigation, and water purification.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tourists satisfy the experience of grazing in the forest; 2. Most users realize the importance of the Agroforestry system; 3. Dramatic increase in trees' number.
 Renewable energy	Solar panels and wind farms will be the main consideration for construction in Scotland due to its geological and morphological features. The main financial sources for renewable energy installation come from companies and the rest can be investment from users in Rural Tourism platforms.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The increasing cooperation with renewable company; 2. Wind farm sites set an example for producing clean electricity in pilot projects; 3. Attract the general public to invest or install renewable felicities.
 Product service	Transparency, justness, and safety are the core of product service projects. It aims to improve local farmers' income and build connections between consumers and local sellers. Consumers can directly purchase high quality food, enjoy artisan goods, and book meals while using Rural Tourism software.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase local people income; 2. Build connection and trust among customers and rural area; 3. Healthy product production and consumption.

Future developments

The **Rural Roots Network** holds an incredible potential. While we plan to start small, focusing on a few farms in the Scottish highlands, this business model is easily scalable to a global scale. In fact, once the coding for the online platform and the application is created, the business is ready to go world-wide. This platform encourages local travel, however it is also easily applicable for international travel. When shipping goods internationally, non-perishable goods, such as locally produced jumpers, will be preferred for the goods bundles.

It is our aim to add two features to the application in the future:

The first feature is to verify users to the certification of the UN's Certification for Sustainable Tourism. With this, it can create a standard that small enterprises and farmers in rural areas are aware of their sustainable impact and the awareness for the tourist is also created to create sustainable environmental, social and economical tourist experiences.

The second function shows users the most sustainable ways to reach the destination, based on the current location they are at the moment. It is an important insight to know that a tourism experience does not only start from the moment a tourist steps on to the new destination but that they are aware of their footprints before and after they are taking their decision to visit a destination. **Rural Roots Network**, wants to create an awareness to the travellers and their CO2 impact when visiting the destination. Giving guidance to act and recommend to use public transportation or biking trails opportunities to the specific attraction.

Rural Roots Network - Building the future of zero-footprint travel, together.