



This ENRD Seminar was organised within the framework of the [EU Action for Smart Villages](#) and the ENRD thematic work on [Smart Villages](#).

The discussions highlighted the wide range of existing tools that can support Smart Villages. It showcased the rich variety of social and digital innovations that are springing up across Europe.

Rural communities can take the initiative to boost rural services such as health, social care, education, energy, connectivity and mobility.



Event Information

Date: 22 May 2018

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Organiser: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 140 - including EU institutions, European organisations, Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and researchers.

Outcomes: Ideas for creating an enabling policy environment for Smart Villages.

Website: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-seminar-smart-villages_en

EU Action for Smart Villages – key note presentations



Phil Hogan, Commissioner DG Agriculture and Rural Development stressed that “Smart Villages are all about making different policies work together, about giving villages the tools to address their own challenges while contributing to the bigger challenges facing society as a whole.”

He pointed out that “we need to support digital infrastructure but we also need to empower rural citizens to develop on- and off-line solutions that strengthen rural vitality through social innovation and smart specialisation”.

The Commissioner informed participants of the intention to include a new result indicator related to smart villages into the forthcoming CAP strategic plans. “Member States may choose to programme funds for municipalities or communities that want to develop into Smart Villages expressing the expected results by setting a target for the number of Smart Village Strategies they intend to support.” The Commissioner recognised that one of the key tools for this remains LEADER / CLLD. However, “it is also clear that other EU funds should also play a role and that financial

instruments and private funds can be leveraged”.

Franc Bogovič, Member of the European Parliament highlighted the growing momentum behind Smart Villages. He reminded participants that it started with the [Cork Declaration 2.0](#), continuing with the ‘EU Action for Smart Villages’ supported by four Commissioners, and followed by the pilot study and preparatory actions financed by the European Commission and, the recent [Bled Declaration](#) on Smart Villages.

He reminded participants that there are already opportunities for involving young farmers and working together to improve the environment and cooperate with urban areas.

“The preparation of the future EU and national policies represents an important opportunity to develop the Smart Villages approach”.



José Enrique Garcilazo – Head of the regional and rural policy unit (OECD) opened the afternoon discussions by pointing to the [‘Edinburgh Policy Statement on Enhancing Rural Innovation’](#).

He argued that small towns and villages are key drivers of productivity.

The OECD has identified ten technological and social ‘megatrends’ which can “unleash the growth potential of rural areas”. However, this requires a combination of integrated place-based policies backed up by tools to empower communities and promote social innovation.

“Digitisation is key but it must be embedded into a broader place-based approach tackling service provision in rural areas”.



Three inspiring stories

Many villages around Europe are bringing their people together to implement a wide variety of initiatives and projects on Smart Villages. Three inspirational examples of active communities were presented during the seminar:

Vuolenkoski Village (Finland)



Kaisa Pethman & Ville Pisto explained how the people of Vuolenkoski village created their own local development company, revitalised the local school and invested time and money in a range of projects from local markets and improved roads to schemes for unemployed young people and sports facilities. The population in the village has grown to 500 – up by 22% in the last ten years. People now want to live in Vuolenkoski because of its quality of life.

Betzdorf-Gebhardshain Municipality (Germany)



Sarah Brühl described how the Betzdorf - Gebhardshain municipality has become one of the first pilot 'digital villages' in Germany. By taking into account the whole village digital 'ecosystem' and focussing on people's real needs, they are pioneering a series of apps in different fields. Their success has been made possible by involving local people and trend leaders from the start, building trust and encouraging a process of trial and error.

Mull & Iona Community Trust (Scotland, UK)



Sandy Brunton explained how Mull & Iona, two islands of Scotland, have created a community-owned enterprise (Community Development Trust) investing in projects bringing value to the community. These include a turbine producing clean energy and generating local revenue, housing, hybrid transport systems, nature conservation etc. Their message is *"be brave, show leadership, plan success and failure and remember it is about the people – not money"*.

Smart Villages Action-Labs: Making it easier for projects in Smart Villages to be successful

Digital innovation projects

Four projects were presented covering Community Broadband, Digital Skills, Digital innovation and Digital hubs. The main recommendations were to: 1) simplify financing to community initiatives under state-aid rules; 2) improve support for facilitating community driven processes involving local champions and volunteers; 3) provide certified training courses to improve digital skill sets; and 4) treat digitisation as a cross-cutting policy and integrate funding sources.

Energy projects

Two projects were presented covering Energy Communities and Smart Rural Grids. The main recommendations were to: 1) create a stable long-term environment for local energy projects by, for example, maintaining feed-in tariffs; 2) animate local communities in developing local energy projects - usually it is not part of mainstream rural development policy; 3) allow community ownership models for accessing funds.

Care and mobility projects

Two projects were presented covering care and mobility. Both fields have major potential for generating gains in social wellbeing. Yet they often fall under the responsibility of different agencies and funding regimes. The main recommendations were to: 1) support the creation of networks and platforms of key agencies and client groups while ensuring the presence of lead actors; 2) create more space for small-scale pilots with upscaling possibilities.



KAT KOTONA ASUMISEN TURVALLISUUS
Safety at home

**REZO
POUCE**

Policy incubators: Creating an enabling policy environment for Smart Villages

Policy-makers and practitioners came together to exchange ideas about existing policy tools for supporting Smart Villages. They focussed on two key fields of opportunity - digital innovation and renewable energy - and one cross-cutting theme - integrated support for Smart Villages. Participants made recommendations about what can be done at different levels to create a more supportive policy environment for Smart Villages.



Digital innovation

[Robert Henkel](#) (DG CONNECT) provided a description of the EU tools available to rural areas for improving connectivity. [Marianne Selkäinaho](#) (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland) described how her country is deploying these and other tools to upgrade digital skills and connectivity as well as encouraging digital innovation in rural services and enterprises. [Steffen Hess](#) (Fraunhofer IESE in Germany), described the importance of supporting projects that work on all parts of village digital ecosystems – always keeping people at the centre of the process and focusing on digital sustainability.



Community energy systems

Renewable energy communities can use their own local natural resources to cut both emissions and their expenditure on external sources of energy. With a sound business model, over time, any profit can be reinvested back in the village. [Josh Roberts \(REScoop\)](#) indicated that there are many communities implementing their own collective energy initiatives. [Jan Steinkohl](#) (DG ENERGY) explained how the EU Clean Energy Package explicitly supports these initiatives. As an example, [Georgios Markou](#) (Ministry of Energy of Greece) described the new framework for the promotion of Energy Communities and Self Consumers in Greece.



Integrated funding for Smart Villages

[Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann](#) (DG AGRI) described the wide range of instruments already available in the RDP toolbox. She said “we have the tools to support smart villages in many ways, but they have to be used – and on their own they are not enough”. [Eleftherios Stravopoulos](#) (DG REGIO) pointed out some of the tools available in Cohesion Policy such as Integrated Territorial Investments, integrated urban strategies, CLLD and smart specialisation. [Martin Traxl](#) (Tyrol Intermediate Body) described how his region was coordinating all these tools at local level using the CLLD approach. He stressed the need for developing common platforms involving all actors and stakeholders, local one-stop-shops, and unified programming and governance at regional levels in the coming years.

Recommendations

- > CLLD is a fundamental tool for Smart Villages but not the only one. Define how **CLLD can best support Smart Villages in combination with the full range of other instruments**. Remove barriers - avoid duplication.
- > Enable communities to **undertake investments in risky projects** by providing animation capacity building, training, business and technical support and seed funding for experimental projects.
- > **Streamline and unify programming and governance structures** - harmonise rules, explore the use of lead funds, earmarked funding, common platforms at different levels, one stop shops, tackle bottlenecks (such as those related to State Aids).
- > **Clarify definitions, criteria and targets for Smart Villages** so that programmes and tools can be operationalised.

Recommendations

- > Create a **supportive funding culture** based on the accumulated knowledge acquired through the implementation of past and current EU and national policy tools. Rather than re-inventing the wheel, to focus on the development of a holistic and integrated policy approach taking stock of the lessons learned so far.
- > Support the **development of long-term, viable business models** ensuring the sustainability of projects.
- > **Raise awareness around digital initiatives** and good practices taking place across rural Europe informing rural citizens on potential benefits.

Recommendations

- > **Raise awareness of the benefits** that Energy Communities can bring to rural areas as well as on the mechanisms available for supporting them.
- > **Ensure that support is available at the start-up phase of local projects** by providing assistance with animation, feasibility studies, administrative requirements and technical support for project development.
- > **Exchange experiences and practices** among communities across Europe about methods for supporting energy communities and implementing the Clean Energy Package.

Reactions to the outcomes of the Seminar



Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann (Director, DG AGRI)

“The proposed new delivery model for the Common Agricultural Policy will provide the ground for the further development of Smart Villages’ approaches by allowing

Member States to design tailor made strategies to better respond to local needs”

“It is a long journey from the first project idea to its successful application and scaling up. The challenge for policy makers everywhere is to create a supportive environment that can empower rural stakeholders to overcome the inevitable hurdles they will face on the way to success”.



Francesco Mantino (Italian National Rural Network)

“There are regulations at EU level, which do not incentivise innovation in the Member States. At the same time, there is a wide variety of local initiatives taking place outside mainstream policies which need support.”

“The future regulations should further encourage cooperation initiatives and partnerships and support the engagement of local people in pilot projects to test new ideas and approaches which are likely to become drivers of agricultural and social innovation”.



Tibor Szanyi (Member of the European Parliament)

“The variety of projects presented at the seminar illustrates perfectly that being smart means using all your assets and resources available to strategically take advantage of the opportunities that create sustainable development in the long term.”

“Together with other colleagues in the European Parliament, we are at work to better communicate and explain at the local level what Smart Villages are. There is still much more to be done to transmit this concept to local rural stakeholders in the right way”.



Sandy Brunton (Community Trust in Scotland)

“For more than 10 years, [Community Energy Scotland](#) provided advisory and technical support to communities willing to engage in the renewable energy sector. We also want all policy and legislation to be rural proofed”.

“Innovations usually start small – and rural areas can offer the ideal environment to pilot innovative approaches which can then be scaled up if successful. To do this, policy makers must allow communities to learn from failure”.

Additional information on Smart Villages

[ENRD Smart Villages Portal](#) [Video on Smart Villages](#)



ENRD PUBLICATIONS:

- [EU Rural Review 26: ‘Smart Villages: Revitalising Rural Services’](#)
- [EU Projects Brochure: ‘Digital and social innovation in rural services’](#)

