

The fourth meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) reviewed its main activities over the last year and discussed the future direction of the ENRD thematic work, looking specifically at areas in which the TG could support the practical implementation of the ideas behind Smart Villages.

Participants highlighted that an improved understanding of the Smart Village concept is now necessary to move 'from ideas to implementation'. The TG's contribution could include orientations for policy implementers on how to develop Smart Village strategies as well as practical examples of choosing and using different instruments, funds and joined-up governance systems.

At the EU level, the priority will be to integrate the Smart Villages approach into the future CAP Strategic Plans and to ensure EU funds work together smoothly on the ground.

Event Information

Date: 12 June 2018

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Organiser: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 40 - including EU institutions, European organisations, Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and researchers.

Outcomes: Ideas for the future work of the Thematic Working Group on Smart Villages.

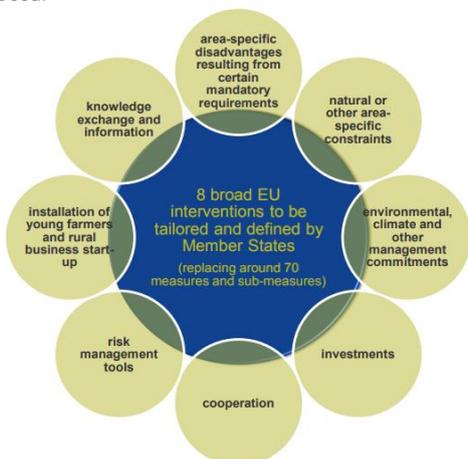
Website: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/4th-meeting-thematic-group-smart-villages_en

Opportunities for Smart Villages in the new legislative proposals

Christiane Kirketerp (DG AGRI) clarified that Smart Village strategies are broader than strategies for digitisation and also cover social innovation. She argued that the priorities now are to increase the understanding of the concept of Smart Villages, explain how to include Smart Villages in the future CAP Plans and to ensure that EU funds worked together more effectively. A new result indicator has been introduced into the CAP legislative proposals for the next period.

The proposals do not include any new EU instrument or fund specifically for Smart Villages, but they provide considerable flexibility for the Member States to use cooperation, CLLD and other types of intervention.

Figure 1: Areas of intervention for RD in the new CAP legislative proposal



Eleftherios Stavropoulos (DG REGIO) pointed out that the new proposed Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) provides a more enabling framework for initiatives like Smart Villages. One of the 5 objectives is a specific objective for a "Europe closer to citizens" which can draw on a series of territorial instruments. The CPR has been simplified and territorial tools like CLLD, ITIs and Sustainable Urban Development alongside CAP interventions can all be used. DG REGIO will be producing internal advice and training on how to use these instruments to support territorial development, including Smart Village approaches.

Pilot Study and preparatory action

Olivier Chartier (ECORYS) who coordinates the Pilot Project on Smart Eco-Social Villages reported on the key findings of their stakeholder survey, concluding that any definition of Smart Villages "should not be restrictive but rather aim to inspire and aspire to". The project will analyse ten best practices and six case studies of rural areas that "want to become smart" in order to produce a road-map for local actors, to be shared at an event in March 2019.



Smart Villages: ‘from ideas to implementation’

TG participants exchanged views about what different countries and stakeholders might need to turn the ideas behind Smart Villages into practice. While there is considerable interest and momentum in certain parts of Europe, it may be hard to make real progress in some places without specific incentives or earmarked funds - particularly in the face of budget restrictions. The following suggestions were made in order to extend the implementation of Smart Village approaches:

Stakeholder needs to bring Smart Villages into practice

STRATEGIES

A clarification of how to develop **Smart Village Strategies** - what they cover, who develops them, at what level, etc. There is a need to build a common understanding which helps to operationalize the concept - while at the same time avoiding exclusive demarcations. The aim should be to inspire “people, passion and projects”.

FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT TOOLS

Practical orientations about how to **use existing and future policy tools**. A wide range of EU tools are already available such as CLLD, various forms of cooperation, investments, financial instruments, H2020, INTERREG and so on. CLLD can be a particularly versatile instrument for supporting Smart Villages but competition and duplication of strategies should be avoided. Managing Authorities and policy implementers at all levels require clear advice about how to adapt and combine these tools to support Smart Villages.

NETWORKING & GOOD PRACTICE

Continuing to build the momentum behind Smart Villages by showcasing more **practical examples** of what can be achieved and **networking initiatives at EU and national levels**.

Suggestions for the future work of the Thematic Group

PRODUCING PRACTICAL ORIENTATIONS FOR POLICY ‘IMPLEMENTERS’

Over the next year the TG could act as a sounding board for developing practical orientations for policy implementers in the form of accessible briefs or fact sheets based on real examples. These could cover:

- > How to develop and design **Smart Village Strategies**.
- > How current and future **EU policy instruments** can be used to support Smart Villages.
- > How different policy instruments and **funds can work together**.

MAPPING AND SHARING INSPIRING PRACTICES

- > **Map and exchange progress** in Member States on the development of **integrated policies** for supporting Smart Villages (digital, social, environmental, etc).
- > Enhance the **Smart Villages portal** with initiatives and examples tackling the economic, social and environmental aspects of Smart Villages.
- > Explore the possibility of producing further communication outputs which convey the **added value of Smart Villages** (particularly videos, etc).

ACTING AS A HUB FOR EU & NATIONAL INITIATIVES RELATED TO SMART VILLAGES

- > Provide a **platform for exchanging** and linking the work of other EU initiatives on Smart Villages.
- > Work with EU stakeholders involved in bringing forward **strategic approaches towards digital innovation** in rural areas (BCO, EIP-AGRI, others...).
- > **Piloting and matchmaking between Member States** that are relatively advanced in developing smart villages and others that are interested in moving forward.