



„European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas”

Planning for Smart Villages in Poland

The Polish Rural Network held a workshop in Warsaw, Poland on 21-22 October 2019 on "*Smart Villages as an effective way to address key challenges in rural areas*". It was held back-to-back with the presentation of the winning initiatives from a competition of the best Polish Smart Village initiatives organised by the Institute for Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences with funding provided by the Polish Rural Network.

Many rural communities are organising to look for innovative, smart solutions to a variety of local challenges. EU Member States are encouraged to promote such “Smart Villages” and offer them enhanced support over the next decade.

The workshop aimed to achieve three goals:

- present existing Smart Villages initiatives (focusing particularly on Central and Eastern Europe) – while we are certain smart solutions are being imagined and implemented by rural communities throughout this part of Europe, not enough is known about them;
- discuss how the Smart Village approach can be transferred and upscaled in the future, e.g. to improve mobility, develop entrepreneurship, benefit from the opportunities of bioeconomy and circular economy, ensure quality education and health services or prevent social exclusion – examples of solutions were presented and discussed;
- prepare recommendations addressed both to the participants of the European Rural Parliament meeting in Asturias, Spain in November 2019 (see below) but also to policy makers in Poland as they work on the future CAP strategic plan.

Over 120 persons participated in the award ceremony of the best Polish Smart Villages initiatives and in the two-day workshop. The majority of participants came from Poland, but it also brought together rural development practitioners from a further nine European countries¹ as well as from the European Commission, the European Network for Rural Development, ELARD and the Smart Village Network. A great variety of stakeholders attended the event: farmers, agricultural advisors, village leaders, regional authorities, ministry officials, LAG representatives, researchers as well as promoters of rural and agricultural innovation. This ensured interesting and inclusive discussions.

Speaking towards at the workshop, Poland’s Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Jan Krzysztof Ardanowski, noted that *‘the recommendations that you are elaborating here are exceptionally important for the next programming period and the provision of support’*. He continued: *‘We will not provide top down solutions for a particular Village. It has to be worked out with the participation of the given community.’*

A final workshop report – due at the end of November 2019 – will present good practice examples of Smart Villages from up to ten European countries.

The workshop was organised by the Polish Rural Network (KSOW) with the help of the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Polish Rural Forum, and moderated by Ryszard Kamiński of the Polish Rural Forum.

¹ Austria, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine

7 recommendations from Warsaw

Conclusions and recommendations from the Polish Rural Network's October 2019 workshop for implementing solutions related to the development of the Smart Villages approach in Poland

Based on the workshop discussions, recommendations have been made in respect of the Smart Villages approach. These are summarised here:

1. **Build on experience – above all, avoid bureaucracy.** Smart Villages must serve the intelligent development of partnerships for innovation (EIP AGRI), "village renewal" and LEADER. However, although LEADER and local action groups (LAGs) can be an important element in the implementation of Smart Villages, they do not possess all the instruments to implement it. Ensuring the cross-sectoral aspect of the Smart Villages approach is key.
2. **Start with one village, but build a partnership.** Smart Villages must be bottom-up in a village / settlement, but the approach needs to be implemented with the local authorities as well as with LAGs, advisory entities (agricultural advisory services and/or chambers of agriculture) and local development centres (entrepreneurship and social affairs). The bottom-up approach of Smart Villages should ensure we avoid producing (yet more) strategic documents.
3. **Take note of the digital lag of villages.** In many countries and regions rural areas are lagging behind in terms of broadband internet infrastructure, e-service availability and the digital literacy of residents. Without coordinated action many rural areas will be excluded from the Smart Villages approach.
4. **People matter.** In addition to including local communities and ensuring a cross-sectoral approach, leaders form a key element of Smart Villages. It is important to ensure funding continuity to maintain the interest and accessibility of local leaders and people involved in the development in rural areas. The involvement of NGOs and volunteering is very important. Smart Villages must be understandable and attractive to people from local communities.
5. **Reward engagement.** A bonus system for the most active rural areas that use the Smart Villages approach for their development should be considered, taking into account the most interesting initiatives in this regard.
6. **Smart Villages can help small farms.** In countries with a large number of small farms, Smart Villages provide an opportunity to create short agri-food supply chains. Advanced IT solutions (purchasing platforms), better cooperation between farmers, the creation of consumer cooperatives and work on building local and regional consumer patriotism are needed.
7. **Provide advice and support for Smart Villages.** New technologies can support the development of animation, the process of reaching farmers and consumers, building the trust of all stakeholders as well as building a business model. Smart Villages requires a combination of solid consulting / brokerage with advanced IT and logistics technology.

Information on Smart Villages in Poland is available on the websites of the Polish Rural Network (www.ksow.pl) and of the Institute for Rural and Agricultural Development (www.irwirpan.waw.pl).

Polish institutions involved with the Smart Villages topic include the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Polish Rural Network (KSOW), the Polish Rural Forum (FAOW), the Polish LAG Network (PS LGD), the Institute for Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IRWiR PAN) as well as RURBAN Wieś-Miasto-Region.

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