



## 7<sup>th</sup> Thematic Group meeting

The seventh meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) brought together around 45 stakeholders from 18 different countries and positions within the policy delivery system. They explored how to design effective packages of support for Smart Villages in the future CAP Strategic Plans as well as how to build synergy with other funds and policies.

Participants jointly developed practical examples of how the toolkit of available European policy instruments can work together in supporting the implementation of Smart Villages Strategies in different contexts.

### Event Information

**Date:** 6 March 2019

**Location:** Brussels, Belgium

**Participants:** 45 participants - including EU institutions, European organisations, Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and researchers.

**Outcomes:** Insights on how interventions can be designed in the future CAP Strategic Plans to support Smart Villages through the toolkit of available interventions.

**Website:** [7<sup>th</sup> TG meeting on Smart Villages](#)

## Using the future CAP Strategic Plans to support Smart Villages



**Stefan Ostergard Jensen (DG AGRI)** explained that, according to the Commission's proposal, Member States should design interventions and set targets in the future CAP Strategic Plans based on a SWOT analysis and assessment of needs. Interventions can contribute to one or more of the specific objectives of the future CAP (SO) depending on their design, but the SO8 for promoting employment, growth, social inclusion and local development, including bio-economy and sustainable forestry, is likely to fit well, as well as the cross-cutting objective for innovation and digitisation. Stefan outlined that the context and local needs differ enormously across Europe, and a 'Smart Village intervention' defined at EU level would therefore not be relevant. Instead, Member States need flexibility to design simple interventions according to their national/regional/local context. He provided a series of possible scenarios and said that it is important to complement existing initiatives in the Member States and avoid additional layers of strategies.

### First ideas from the Member States



**Marianne Selkäinaho (Managing Authority, Finland)** explained that in Finland they have organised 29 workshops with stakeholders around the country to reflect on the CAP Strategic Plans. Preliminary discussions about Smart Villages highlight the need to add value to existing local Smart Villages Plans by facilitating cooperation at local level and connecting with LEADER Local Development Strategies. Possible interventions being assessed are: i) implementing the EIP approach with Smart Villages operational groups; ii) Smart Villages initiatives as part of a LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS) and supporting a Smart Villages activator in the LAGs; iii) umbrella or theme project for Smart Villages. She concluded that all of them will probably be necessary.



**Julian Gschnell (Managing Authority, Austria)** indicated that one ministry (the Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism) will manage both EAFRD and ERDF. For the implementation of Smart Villages, Austria is looking at the Tyrol model, where the multifunded CLLD is applied according to the rules of the EAFRD lead fund. A 'one-stop shop' exists for most national and European programmes at the local level. Discussions have started with stakeholders to identify the best way to implement the Smart Villages concept, namely: i) Smart Village strategies integrated in LEADER LDS; ii) additional funds (EU and/or national) dedicated to LEADER to implement Smart Villages; iii) developing a specific cooperation intervention for Smart Villages – all under the umbrella of the Smart Tyrol Region.



## Insights for planning Smart Villages interventions

The boxes below summarise some of the key messages that came out of the exploratory exercise carried out by TG members on planning support for Smart Villages in the future [CAP Strategic Plans](#), according to the Commission proposal.

### SWOT & identification and prioritisation of needs

- > MS should conduct research and above all involve local stakeholders in the mapping and prioritisation of needs and identifying gaps in support. Existing context indicators are not sufficient for designing effective support systems;
- > Some rural needs may be thematic (e.g. digital, renewables, services, etc.) others cross-cutting (e.g. animation, capacity building, pilots, etc). It is important to assess which needs are best dealt with by local Smart Villages Strategies;
- > This process should start early. Rural Networks can play a key role.

### Designing interventions

- > Consider what works and what does not work in the existing toolkit of interventions (Cooperation, CLLD, investment support, start-up aid, etc.). Adapt them and design the right combination, taking into account other national initiatives;
- > The ideal model blends investments in people with investments in physical assets. These can be aligned in various ways (e.g. selection criteria, investment reserves, etc.);
- > To help areas with low social capital, rural communities should be supported to take small new steps on a development trajectory;
- > Any new model of support requires time and skills. Initial targets should be realistic. Social innovation brokers can facilitate the process.

## Creating synergies between the CAP Strategic Plans and other funds

### Support from Cohesion policy



**Eleftherios Stavropoulos** (DG REGIO) described the tools within the ERDF that can support the implementation of Smart Villages. Cohesion policy objective 5 'A Europe closer to citizens', focuses on territorial development and includes interventions targeting mountainous areas, islands and coastal areas, sparsely populated areas and other types of territories. Support can be provided through CLLD, Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) and other territorial tools. The 6% of the ERDF earmarked for Sustainable Urban Development can support small towns and cities and rural-urban linkages. Smart Specialisation Strategies and INTERREG are also support vehicles. National/regional and local stakeholders need to take a proactive approach in designing a supportive framework.



**Lyubomira Derelieva** (DG EMPL) explained the ways in which the future ESF+ can support Smart Villages. In particular, all Member States are obliged to support actions of "social innovation and social experimentation or strengthen bottom up approaches based on partnerships such...as Local Action Groups..." (Art. 13 ESF+). They may also support the upscaling of innovative approaches tested on a small scale. There are strong incentives to do this in the form of 95% co-financing for up to 5% of total ESF expenditure. In addition, the ESF+ proposals recommend direct support from the Commission to transnational social innovation initiatives at EU level (Art. 23i).

### How to work together?



**Francesco Mantino** (Italian NRN) provided some lessons about how EU and National Funds can work closer together based on the experience of the Italian [Inner Area Strategy](#) which now combines all four European Structural and Investment Funds. He pointed out that the terms and definitions in the proposed CAP Strategic Plans and Partnership Agreements are different. Therefore, it will be necessary to create a 'common institutional space' for ensuring synergy between the objectives and common rules for designing interventions such as CLLD. One way would be for EAFRD representatives to participate in discussions on the Partnership Agreement. This requires strong political will.

### Steps to ensure synergies between policies

- > Creation of a 'common institutional space' such as an inter-Ministerial office or joint committee for planning and programming;
- > One institution (MA) should take the lead in harmonising procedures, possibly using the opportunities of a 'Lead Fund';
- > Ensure a one-stop shop or single-entry point at local level (such as in Tyrol, Austria) to provide fast and flexible support to local people from all funds - ideally under the umbrella of a single strategy for each area;
- > Use common simplified grant aid systems such as lump-sums based on a business plan – e.g. the 'ticket' for young rural entrepreneurs (Asturias RDP, ES) or theme projects (Finland).

