



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

The eighth meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) brought together around 60 stakeholders from 19 different countries. Participants explored 'on site' how a specific village (Lormes, France) has embarked on a participative process to co-design a 'village of the future' and the way they have built different components of the local 'digital ecosystem'. Participants also learnt from similar initiatives and plans for developing local digital ecosystems in Germany, Spain and Donegal (Ireland).

In terms of future work, TG members expressed interest in working together on how to implement Smart Villages in specific territorial contexts and themes. At the same time, they stressed the importance of communicating and maintaining the momentum behind Smart Villages at all levels.

#### Event Information

**Date:** 6 June 2019

**Location:** Lormes, France

**Participants:** 60 participants - including EU institutions, European organisations, Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, Local Action Groups (LAGs), local authorities, stakeholder organisations and researchers.

**Outcomes:** Insights on plans for developing local digital ecosystems.

**Website:** [8<sup>th</sup> TG meeting on Smart Villages](#)

### Lormes: The village of the future

Lormes is a small market town (1 300 residents) located in the Morvan area, in the county of Nièvre, Burgundy (France). The 'village du futur' project was initiated in Lormes in 2015. This is the latest step in its digital and social journey towards being a village of the future, which began in the early 2000s, with a ground-breaking territorial 2.0 policy to foster the economic and social potential of ICT and internet.

Co-designing that future with the community has been a cornerstone of the process since the beginning and key to its success. In 2003, they set up the first 'Digital Mission' association to provide digital inclusion and education support to the community. This association acted as an accelerator of local 'digital transformation'. A local digital hub opened in 2008 (in a former derelict slaughterhouse), offering training and educational facilities and eight small offices, and expanded in 2015 with a FabLab, improved office space for six more businesses and meeting-training facilities (it offers a 300 Mbit/s connection). The Mission serves all 166 Communes in the Pays Nivernais, and now manages a satellite working space and FabLab in two other towns with LEADER Local Development Strategies. By creating an open digital infrastructure and environment in Lormes, new digital innovations and services are being integrated into existing digital and 'future' strategies.



#### Other village achievements

- > Senior Care Home with tele-geriatric consultations.
- > New primary school that respect low-energy standards.
- > Digital teaching tools adapted to the special needs.
- > Three free Wi-Fi points.
- > A drone service to monitor building energy loss, plant growth and crops for local farmers and regional parc.
- > A community sensor project monitors water, air and energy quality.
- > Young 'Fibre Advisers' to improve the digital inclusion of elderly people.



# Strategic approaches for digitisation of rural areas

**Rural digitisation strategies in France.** A panel of key stakeholders exchanged views on French strategies and initiatives for digitalising rural areas. See Case Study 'French strategies for digitising rural areas'.



**Christian Paul** (Chair of Pays Nivernais Morvan Joint Authority)



**Fabien Bazin** (Mayor of Lormes, Chair Nièvre Numérique)



**Cédric Szabo** (Director of the of French Rural Mayors Association)



**Marc Laget** (General Commission for Territorial Equality – CGET)

## Some key messages

- > It is important to demonstrate how digital solutions provide answers which improve the daily lives of people living in rural areas. This means showcasing practical examples and finding a balance between short-term physical improvements to the village and longer-term digital transformation.
- > The first step is a participative diagnosis of the 'digital maturity' of each territory followed by a process of 'co-design' involving the local population, municipalities and specialists. Leadership is vital and can come from civil society, public and private sectors.
- > Rural areas differ in their capacity and resources. To avoid digital exclusion, it is important to promote the more advanced 'nuggets' as examples while at the same time providing common tools and financial mechanisms which encourage bunching and clustering effects among other rural areas.
- > Digital transformation requires breaking out of a passive 'waiting for call for tender approach' and taking the initiative to mobilise resources locally - in partnership with other levels of government. See the [Case Study](#) for examples of relevant French policies and tools.

## Rural digitisation strategy in Spain

**María Teresa Ambros** (Ministry of Agriculture) described the recently launched Spanish Strategy for the digitisation of the agri-food, forestry sector and rural areas. The strategy focuses on reducing the digital divide, supporting data use and boosting enterprise development and new business models. Maria explained some of the key actions to enhance local digital capacities and strengthen local digital innovation ecosystems. These include promoting digital innovation hubs, innovative public purchasing, living labs and supporting digital entrepreneurship (including teleworking). See [Case Study](#) 'Spanish strategies for digitising rural areas'.

## Rural digitisation strategy in Germany

**Meik Poschen**, (Federal Office of Agriculture and Food) described the 'Smart Rural Regions' pilot that will be shortly launched by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. This aims to extend some of the ideas tested in the Digital Villages [Initiative](#) to up to 7 rural districts. Each participating district will develop a comprehensive digitisation strategy to support the implementation of digital services/applications, create an open and standardised service network (digital platform) and build digital competences. Meik stressed the importance of an interactive process of co-design between local stakeholders and external experts and facilitators to translate local needs into appropriate digital solutions. See [Case Study](#) 'German strategies for digitising rural areas'

## Rural digitisation strategy in Donegal

**Jose Manuel San Emeterio** (ERNACT) described the local digital transformation strategy in Donegal County. It aims to i) increase digital research; ii) build a strong digital community; and iii) strengthen the local digital cluster. They are creating a hierarchical network of digital hubs providing a range of digital services in areas such as energy, tourism, food chain, public sectors, businesses, skills, etc. They are concerned with matching the supply of digital skills with emerging jobs and accessing knowledge in other EU regions.

### Some key questions and messages

- **Common questions** included how to: a) train and attract digital talent, b) encourage flexibility at local level while maintaining coherence with wider strategies, c) prioritise and add value to local initiatives, d) communicate the benefits, e) provide faster more flexible financial support, and many more.
- **Key messages** included: **1)** developing a clear vision and narrative with examples of the benefits for people's lives, **2)** using digital animators and facilitators, **3)** the importance of networks of digital hubs, **4)** using lump sums and incentives to support preparatory work, **5)** co-designing useful applications with users and attracting talent.

