



Designing support for Smart Villages in the CAP Strategic Plans and Cohesion Policy: Questions and ideas for discussion from the Thematic Group

At the [webinar](#) of the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages held on 1 April 2020, Managing Authorities and stakeholders from different parts of Europe raised several questions about how best to programme support for Smart Villages in the future CAP Strategic Plans (CSP) and other policies. In preparation for the next meeting of the Thematic Group, the Contact Point has grouped these questions together and drawn on the past discussions and publications of the Thematic Group to suggest some responses. These suggestions are for discussion and do not constitute any kind of official guidance, nor do they represent the official opinion of the European Commission.

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What qualifies as 'Smart'? What criteria are being used for distinguishing actions to be supported under Smart Villages from others?

After a long process of consultations, the [Pilot Project](#) on Smart Eco-Social Villages explicitly recommended taking a broad and inclusive approach to allow for the diversity of challenges faced in different Member States. However, this can make it difficult for Managing Authorities to decide what 'smart' is and to design effective criteria. The following suggestions have emerged from discussions in the ENRD Thematic Group:

- **Scale:** Smart Villages support should be able to respond to needs identified at the very local level, for example, one or two village/settlements (generally at a smaller territorial scale than a Local Development Strategy as developed under LEADER). However, some key challenges addressed by Smart Villages require action at larger scales to be sustainable (in energy, service provision, and mobility, for example). Therefore, some Member States may use Smart Villages to encourage cooperation between villages/rural communities facing similar problems (see below the ideas in Finland). It is up to each Member State, based on its SWOT analysis and needs identification, to design support at the scales that suit their context.
- **Participation:** initiatives should be driven by local stakeholders who want to take action to respond to a need, challenge or opportunity. The aim of Smart Villages support is to empower and strengthen this bottom-up initiative, not impose it from the top.
- **Innovation:** evidence is needed to show that the Smart Village Strategy is designed to find *new or alternative solutions* to the underlying challenges and opportunities in the *specific context of the local situation*. The innovation in Smart Villages is a response to local needs and capacity and could be as much social as technological. It does not



always require advanced technology or high-level research, but digitalisation offers new opportunities and could therefore be part of the solution. However, Smart Villages is not usually seen as a tool for supporting standard, business-as-usual investments. The precise dividing line is sensitive and needs to be set carefully in each context.

- **Use of digital technologies:** they are very important, although not a prerequisite. However, depending on circumstances, some Member States may want to prioritise initiatives which involve digital technologies.
- **Scope of action:** Smart Villages can cover a wide range of economic, environmental or social needs and challenges identified locally. A key word is often 'support' for enabling communities to contribute to a transition in these fields.

More information



- > ENRD Briefing on [Smart Villages in Finland: ideas for designing support in the future CAP Strategic Plans.](#)
- > ENRD Briefing on [How to support Smart Villages strategies which effectively empower rural communities?](#)
- > ENRD Rural Review 26 '[Smart Villages: Revitalising Rural Services](#)'

What is the link with existing initiatives like LEADER? How to add value and avoid overlapping strategies and structures?

- **Smaller scale:** as mentioned, support for Smart Villages should strengthen the capacity to respond to citizens' concerns at a very local level. At the same time, it may support cooperation between rural communities that cross over several LEADER areas.
- **More targeted:** the aim of Smart Villages is not to create a series of integrated 'mini- LEADER' strategies at village level, but to provide additional and more flexible tools for local stakeholders to take action and respond to the specific challenges they have identified.
- **Opening up new fields for local action:** Smart Villages often support citizens coming together to find local solutions to some of the complex structural problems they face in fields such education, health, social services, digital connections, mobility, energy, climate change, and agri-food supply chains. These are highly regulated fields with competences often distributed between many different agencies and administrative levels. Smart Villages aim to provide local communities with resources, tools and recognition to work together to develop bottom-up solutions in these fields. In this way, Smart Villages can extend help, strengthen and extend the scope of both LEADER and Operational Groups.
- **Building sustainable local business models and leveraging in further investment:** support for Smart Villages does not pretend to solve all the underlying problems at local level through grant aid. Rather it mobilises public, private and civil society resources and energy to create the conditions for further sustainable investment.
- **Strengthening local capacity:** the Thematic Group has identified five key conditions for strengthening the capacity of rural communities to become Smart Villages: more resources for local facilitation and animation, better access to specialised knowledge, faster more flexible finance for community-led innovation, better alignment with investments and other measures, and stronger and more flexible cooperation. LEADER and other forms of cooperation can play a major role in supporting Smart Villages - but to do so, these conditions must be present.

More information



- > ENRD Briefing on [How can LEADER/CLLD support Smart Villages?](#)
- > ENRD Briefing on [Using non-LEADER/CLLD cooperation to support Smart Villages](#)
- > ENRD Briefing on [How to work with Smart Villages? Orientations for LEADER LAGs](#)
- > ENRD Briefing on [Business models for rural services](#)

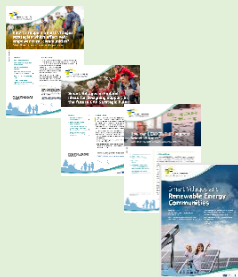
What interventions in the future CAP Strategic Plans can best be used to support Smart Villages¹?

- **Cooperation (art.71):** There is a growing consensus that the cooperation intervention is the starting point for designing support for Smart Villages. It can support the preliminary ‘soft’ intangible expenditure (for getting people together, building capacity, carrying out technical and viability studies, pilots), as well as small scale investments.

Member States are exploring different alternatives to ensure that this meets the needs of their rural communities in fast and flexible ways – lump sums for initial preparatory support ([Finland](#) and Poland). Umbrella Projects, Draft Budgets, Smart Villages Cooperation and Activation Projects (see ideas in [Finland](#)), enabling LEADER (Austria and Ireland).

- **Investments (art.68):** Member States also indicate that fruitful actions supported through the cooperation intervention (including LEADER) can create the right conditions for investments support, as well as for the development of digital technologies in agriculture and rural areas. Article 68 can support larger scale tangible and intangible investments. Member States are considering various ideas for introducing criteria or preferences to ensure that investments are aligned with and benefit Smart Villages.
- **Links with other EU funds and policies:** many questions have been raised about how best to link to Cohesion Policy (for example through Specific Objective 5 Europe closer to citizens, Integrated Territorial Instruments and other investments), as well as other policies such as Renewable Energy Communities under the Renewable Energy Directive (REDII), Financial Instruments, Horizon Europe, Digital Declaration on a smart agri-food sector and smart rural areas etc. Enhancing linkages and synergies with other Funds and policies is a fundamental aspect to be considered when programming Smart Villages in the future CAP Strategic Plans.

More information



- > ENRD Briefing on [Smart Villages in Finland: ideas for designing support in the future CAP Strategic Plans.](#)
- > Presentation [The existing rural development measures and ideas for future framework for supporting Smart Villages in Poland](#)
- > ENRD Briefing on [How to support Smart Villages strategies which effectively empower rural communities?](#)
- > ENRD Briefing on [Using non-LEADER/CLLD cooperation to support Smart Villages](#)
- > ENRD Briefing on [Smart Villages and Renewable Energy Communities](#)

How to improve access to information and knowledge for Smart Villages?

Innovation brokers are being proposed in several countries ([Finland](#) and [Poland](#)). These are people who can locate and attract the specialised knowledge providers who can provide technical and economic answers to help implement the actions proposed by Smart Villages. Member States are exploring the role of National Rural Networks and LEADER groups, both of which would require resourcing.



For further information, please visit the [Smart Villages Portal](#) and [Toolkit](#).

¹ The elements discussed below are based on the Commission’s proposal for a CAP Strategic Plan Regulation which is subject to changes following decisions of the co-legislators in the legislative procedure.

