

FRANCE

Technical assistance

Location

Communes of Alpes
Provence Verdon

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Measure

M20 – Technical assistance

Funding (EUR)

EAFRD: salary of the
Regional Rural Network
facilitator (30% of time
devoted to this project)
National/Regional: contrib.
to the salary of the RN
facilitator & salaries of the
Development Agency and
Community of Municipalities

Project duration

2018 – 2019

Project promoter

Réseau Rural Provence-
Alpes-Côte d'Azur

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<https://reseau-rural.maregionsud.fr/chantiers/acces-aux-services-smart-ruralite/>

The project mobilised all actors of the Communauté de Communes Alpes-Provence-Verdon to formulate a strategy for the territory's digital transition.

Summary

Digital transition is a major challenge for rural actors, who need to integrate digital technology into the development strategy for their territories.



To support the challenges presented by digital transition in rural areas, in June 2018 the Regional Rural Network launched an experimental approach in the territory Communauté de Communes Alpes-Provence-Verdon (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence) called "Smart ruralité Alpes-Provence-Verdon". It was aimed at offering public decision-makers tools that would enable them to identify and consequently anticipate the digital transformations that their rural territory required. Activities that were carried out included conducting a territorial diagnosis, developing an action plan by setting up four thematic working groups and then implementing the action plan.

Results

This pilot project made it possible to trial a methodology that can be transferred to other rural territories in the region.

Other benefits that will emerge from applying such a territorial methodology and facilitating digital transition include:

- more businesses will be able to operate in the region and thus create employment opportunities;
- the use of digital tools will reduce the need for transportation using fossil fuels and save energy; and
- rural areas can maintain their populations by reducing the digital divide.

Context

The process of digital transition is a major challenge for rural areas. The attractiveness of rural areas as a place to live and work, especially for younger people, depends on the accessibility of digital resources. It is, therefore, in the interest of rural actors to adopt global digital development strategies and to do so by sharing their approaches or even pooling their digital projects and services.

The vast rural territory of the Communauté de Communes of Alpes-Provence-Verdon represents a quarter of the surface area of the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence region, but only 7 % of its population lives there. In addition, it is the territory in the region with the lowest digital coverage. Thus, digital connectivity must be increased to create opportunities to boost the local economy through tourism, agriculture, small businesses and services, but also to improve the daily lives of its inhabitants.

In June 2018, the Regional Rural Network launched an experimental approach in the territory titled 'Smart ruralité Alpes-Provence-Verdon'. This approach was aimed at offering public decision-makers the tools to enable them to identify and consequently anticipate the digital transformations that their rural territory requires.

The project was carried out in partnership with the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, the Communauté de Communes Alpes-Provence-Verdon and the Agence de Développement des Alpes-de-Haute-Provence. The objective was to create a network of actors and test the methodology, which could then be transferred to other territories in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. Other rural territories in the region were also interested in implementing this approach in their territory.

Objectives

The project's operational objectives were to:

- define a strategy for digital transition in the territory by mobilising all stakeholders in rural development from different sectors, e.g. commerce, tourism, culture, education, health etc.;
- identify digital coverage priorities for the territory; and

- prioritise / plan the actions to be carried out to develop the use of digital services in the target area.

Activities

The project's planned activities included:

- conducting a territorial diagnosis with the support of the region's Development Agency (Apr–Sept 2018);
- developing an action plan by setting up four thematic working groups to make concrete proposals related to digital technology in the region (Dec 2018–Jan 2019); and
- implementing the action plan.

Various topics were covered by the working groups:

1. "Fixed and mobile digital networks" – the group discussed the challenges in the territory in terms of digital infrastructure and mobile telephone coverage and categorised infrastructure needs for all sectors of the local economy, public services and inhabitants.
2. "Tourism – Economy – Agriculture" – the group identified the digital strategy needs for these sectors of the local economy and the actions to be carried out.
3. "Services" – the group focused on the issues of health, mobility and education, as well as other essential services, whose evolution towards digital tools is likely to guarantee a quality service.
4. "Cooperation – Mutualisation – Innovation" – the group worked on solutions for mutualisation between administrations (interoperability of tools) and creating transversality between the different themes (e.g. collaborative tools: platform, Open Lab etc.).

At least two meetings were held by each working group.

All actors in the territory were mobilised around this project, including local authorities (elected officials and technicians), state representatives from the Sub-Prefecture, National Education Department, Regional Health Agency, mixed unions, consular chambers, associations, tourism offices, Agency for Economic Development and Tourism, national parks, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and companies.

On the basis of the territorial issues identified for each of the working group themes, participants were asked to identify a list of actions to be carried out (including actions already in progress) and propose priorities for action along with a work schedule to quickly launch a few mobilising projects related to digital technology. Examples of projects were mobile applications for pastoralism, access to services and distance learning, a hack-a-thon, an e-commerce platform promoting short supply chains etc.

The project was part of the "Smart Villages" initiative promoted by the European Union, the objective of which is to support rural areas in seeking development opportunities through digital technologies and innovations.

The project was carried out in collaboration with the LAGs under LEADER du Grand Verdon, which followed the whole process and offered an avenue for financing emerging projects.

Finally, the digital infrastructure projects could also seek funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Currently, the Syndicat Mixte "PACA Très Haut Débit", which aims to connect priority sites in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence region, is partly financed by the ERDF (EUR 10 000 000).

Main Results

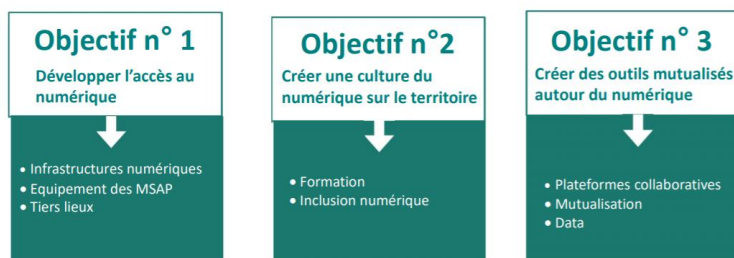
This pilot project trialled a methodology that can be transferred to other rural territories in the region.

Anticipated benefits that will emerge from implementing such a territorial methodology to facilitate widescale digital transition include:

- more businesses being able to operate in the region and thus create employment opportunities;
- reduced need for transport using fossil fuels and energy savings; and
- maintaining the population in rural areas by reducing the digital divide.

LE PLAN D' ACTIONS TERRITORIAL

► Les grands objectifs retenus :



4^e COPIL SMART RURALITE
Alpes-Provence-Verdon



ALPES DE HAUTE
PROVENCE
AGENCE DE DEVELOPPEMENT



REGION
SUD
PROVENCE
COTE D'AZUR



Additional sources of information

Video of the Forum of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Rural Network, on October 2 in Manosque:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBGqnwaA5oI> (2'34 to 2'54 on Smart Rurality)