



European Network for  
Rural Development

# Smart Villages



## ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages

### Year 6 Workplan

July 2019- July 2020

July 2019



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## 1. Introduction

‘Smart Villages’ is the current sub-theme of the broader ENRD thematic work on ‘Smart and Competitive Rural Areas’. The Thematic Group (TG) has been working on this topic since July 2017 and will continue until July 2020.

During its first year, the TG explored ideas and initiatives for revitalising rural services through digital and social innovation. It looked at how rural services – such as health, social services, education, energy, transport, retail – can be improved and made more sustainable through the deployment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools and through community-led actions and projects.

in its second year of operation, the aim was to shift from showcasing and sharing the wide range of policies and initiatives that are emerging – towards exploring in more depth how these initiatives can best be supported. The TG acted as a sounding board for developing practical orientations for using all the policy tools available to help Smart Villages emerge and develop – now and in the future – while at the same time continuing to provide a platform for linking the initiatives taking place in different parts of Europe. These activities have produced some notable results:

- The TG developed four briefings with orientations for policy makers and implementers on how to support Smart Villages. These briefings were co-created by a variety of stakeholders from across Europe, which improved the ownership of the content and recommendations provided. As a result, in some MS, the information and recommendations from the briefings are being taken on board by rural stakeholders in their national discussions about the future of the CAP (e.g. in Ireland, Finland and Slovenia). In addition, 4 Case Studies on the Digital Strategies in four MS were prepared under this priority
- All the outputs as well as additional links to Smart Village projects, initiatives and research taking place around Europe were brought together in the Smart Village Portal, which was revamped this year with a more user-friendly layout and structure. This and the thematic website section have proved to be extremely successful with more than 35 000 page views (out of which 21 046 for the SV portal).
- The level of stakeholder interest and involvement in the TG on Smart Villages (SV) was extremely high with 172 people attending the four TG meetings and more than 400 members registered for the TG.
- A new Smart Villages community of Facebook was created in December 2018. In the first 7 months of life, more than 900 people have registered as members and are exchanging information and initiatives on Smart Villages.
- More than 25 networking missions were carried out on Smart Villages which included participation in 20 relevant transnational events on Smart Villages organized by key European and national institutions such European Commission, European Parliament, BCO Network, CPMR, CoR, EUSALP-Interreg among others.

The challenge for the TG in Y6 is to maintain the momentum that has been built up over the last 2 years in a complex and uncertain scenario where there is no specific policy instrument or budget line foreseen Smart Villages. While the four policy briefs have made some progress in this direction, Member States and local stakeholders are nonetheless still faced with a bewildering array of questions when it comes to translating the recommendations in the briefs into concrete actions for designing enabling policies for Smart Villages.

As the policy landscape facing rural communities across Europe is so diverse and they differ so much in the local assets at their disposal, it has become difficult to make much more progress in terms of general EU wide policy recommendations. Consequently, the TG has made several recommendations which are reflected in the objectives of the Y6 workplan

## 2. Objectives of the Thematic Group

As stated in the CP AWP, the overall objective of the ENRD TG on Smart Village in Y6 is:

To turn the considerable momentum that has been created around Smart Villages into concrete proposals for designing support for Smart Villages in the new programming period, implying at this stage in the programming cycle a reinforced focus on supporting Managing Authorities, alongside other stakeholder groups. This will be done in three main ways

- a. Firstly, by producing a series capacity building tools for helping rural stakeholders, and particularly Managing Authorities, to assess what conditions are in place for supporting successful Smart Village initiatives in their own context.
- b. Secondly, by organising the Y6 Thematic Group meetings in the form of implementation “clinics” or “laboratories” which allow Member States to work together on designing the building blocks for Smart Village Strategies in a specific geographical or thematic context.
- c. Thirdly by spreading these examples by continuing the communication activities and by building the collection of smart village type initiatives at all levels.

## 3. Main activities, outputs and their feed in-out to other CP activities

### 3.1. Capacity building tools

The aim is to collaborate with existing EU networks and research projects (Horizon 2020, INTERREG, Pilot Projects) to identify the enabling conditions required at Member State level for supporting Smart Villages in certain key fields (**digitalisation, renewable energy communities and mobility**<sup>1</sup>). This work will be translated into specific capacity building tools for helping rural stakeholders to assess whether the conditions are in place for successful Smart Village initiatives in their country and for supporting Managing Authorities in particular to design and implement appropriate support tools, including within the future CAP Strategic Plans.

The implementation of the Smart Villages concept requires a) designing an effective policy framework at a macro level and b) building the capacity of local communities to use this framework (e.g. designing and implementing smart village strategies at local level).

One of the challenges for Smart Villages is to ensure that these two levels are synchronised. Many of the potential fields of intervention of Smart Village Strategies concern highly regulated sectors where competences are spread between a range of higher-level public and private actors. Consequently, while the needs for action may emerge at local level - the scope for certain solutions may require action and cooperation at different scales. In order to support both Managing Authorities and local stakeholders, the CP will commission three simple, easily understandable, capacity building tools in the form of **short 4-pages leaflets** from experts involved in some of the most prominent EU networks and research projects in each respective field.

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<sup>1</sup> These topics were identified as a result of the feedback provided by TG members during Y5.

### 3.2. Thematic Group meetings

The aim is to organise up to four thematic group meetings in the form of implementation “clinics” or “laboratories”. Consideration will be given for one or more of the TG meetings to be co-hosted by a Member State interested in exploring how to prepare and launch support for Smart Villages with a group of peers in different member states.

Meetings will either be organised around a geographical cluster (e.g. Northern, Southern, Central and Eastern) or around specific aspects of Smart Villages of concern to the hosts (for example, how to effectively design the interventions envisaged in the CAP Strategic Plans to support villages wishing to create renewable energy communities or sustainable mobility plans).

The aim is to focus each event around a real practical case led by a motivated partner. Participants will be provided background material on the existing policy landscape, the assets/opportunities and the challenges faced by rural communities. The lead partner would then pose a series of questions about how to design an enabling policy framework which they would like to discuss with peers paying particular attention to the future CAP Strategic Plans. The participants will explore how to develop the necessary joint working with other EU and National funds and policy instruments, ideally leading to the creation of informal platforms of concerned stakeholders prepared to help each other.

The first meeting is planned in Finland in the second half of November with another local meeting possible in a Southern or Central and Eastern country (TBC). A further meeting could focus on a thematic case study – for example, support for renewable energy communities. The precise content, format and dates of the meetings will be agreed with the Thematic Group Members and will be adapted to take account of the lessons from the first events.

### 3.3. Case studies and communication

To carry out a series of communication activities to spread the knowledge acquired through the points above to a wider audience. This could include further developing the Smart Villages portal and Facebook Community, continuing to build the collection of smart village type- initiatives (at all levels programmes, MS, region , individual villages) shared on the Portal, the production of simple printed material (for example, infographics about the building blocks for supporting Smart Villages), launching a call for videos, and so on.

The main strands of this work can include:

- Commissioning further case studies of emblematic Smart Village Initiatives and updating links to the large number of initiatives taking place.
- Updating and revamping the Smart Villages portal.
- Promoting the capacity building tools in the form of short 4-pages leaflets described above.
- The collection of videos and communication outputs on Smart Villages initiatives (TBC).
- Short video-clip interviews / stakeholder reflections with key experts (TBC).
- Using social media and other techniques to keep the large numbers of people interested in the TG informed and involved in-between meetings.

### 3.4. Link in-out to other CP activities

The TG will work in close coordination with the stakeholders involved in the CPs three capacity building strands (NRNs, Managing Authorities and LEADER Local Action Groups) to identify those MS that are interested in working together to explore the best ways of rolling out support for Smart Villages in the next programming period.

**NRNs** will be essential partners in any of the meetings held “in situ” as well as those held in Brussels which focus on the design of support for Smart Villages in a particular country or group of countries. They will also play a central role in disseminating the findings to stakeholders in their respective countries. At the last NRN meeting in Romania, eleven out of fourteen<sup>2</sup> NRN representatives responded that there is interest in their Member States in programming support to Smart Villages in the future CAP Strategic Plans. The majority of these were concerned to find out more about how to programme support



**LEADER** is likely the main delivery mechanism for supporting the initial preparatory phases of Smart Villages as well as following this through in various ways. LEADER representatives have played an important role in the Thematic Group up to now and are active in supporting the preparations for supporting Smart Villages in several countries (for example in Spain, Ireland, Czech Republic). An ENRD LEADER Workshop 'Thematic lab' on Smart Villages is planned on how LEADER/CLLD can support villages to become “smarter” under the ENRD CP P3 Priority.

During Y6 the aim is also to consolidate the links between the TG on Smart Villages and the other two ENRD thematic priorities. For example, in some places Smart Village Strategies may support local approaches to building local bio-economy supply chains as shown in the workshop in the recent ENRD seminar on Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy. Similarly, SV strategies can make a contribution to tackling depopulation and creating vibrant rural areas.







Finally, the collection of good practices and projects may provide a number of relevant examples to be showcased and analysed (possibly after further research) in the framework of the TG which can be promoted through the Smart Villages Portal.

The following charts present the core activities and outputs of the Thematic Group (Table 1) and the indicative work plan (Table 2).

**Table 1: Main activities and outputs of the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages**

ACTIVITIES	
	<p><b>Background research</b></p> <p>Background research commissioned from external experts on the policy frameworks required to support Smart Villages in specific fields such as rural digitalisation, renewable energy communities and mobility. This research will support the development of the capacity building tools in the form of short 4-page leaflets mentioned below.</p>
	<p><b>Three TG meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> TG meeting (19-20 November 2019)</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> TG meeting (January 2019 - tbc)</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> TG meeting (March 2019 - tbc)</li> <li>• 4<sup>th</sup> TG meeting (tbc)</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Romania, Slovakia, Poland, Northern Ireland, Belgium-Wallonia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Latvia, Croatia and the Czech Republic

<p><b>Smart Villages initiatives emerging across the EU</b></p> 	<p>Exchange with TG members to identify key Case Studies on lighthouse initiatives on Smart Villages happening in the EU. These initiatives will add to the existing inspiring examples promoted by the TG. They will also feed the content of the Smart Villages Portal and the Facebook community.</p>
<p><b>Participating in EU and national events on Smart villages</b></p> 	<p>The ENRD CP will contribute to relevant events on Smart Villages across the EU. This will help to communicate further the outcomes of the TG and to identify interesting initiatives on SV.</p>
<p><b>OUTPUTS</b></p>	
<p><b>Smart Villages meeting highlights</b></p> 	<p>Highlights with the main outcomes from each of the TG meetings in a visual, reader-friendly format for broad dissemination.</p>
<p><b>Capacity building tools</b></p> 	<p>A series of capacity building tools will be developed based on inputs and discussion with key experts, TG members. The outputs should take the form of visually attractive, short (ideally) 4-page leaflets that provide orientations to stakeholders about how to support Smart Village Strategies in specific fields (rural digitalisation, renewable energy communities and mobility). These tools might be complemented with short videos interviews with key experts about the specific documents.</p>
<p><b>Smart Villages web portal and Facebook community</b></p> 	<p>The Smart Villages Portal will be enhanced with a more modern layout and improved presentation of the information. The work can include regular updates of the content in term of policy initiatives, projects, relevant stakeholders, events and news, multimedia, interactive and visual tools, etc. In addition, the TG will continue with the animation of the Smart Villages Community on Facebook.</p>
<p><b>TG summary report</b></p> 	<p>Synthesis of the key outcomes developed and activities of the throughout the year in a brief document.</p>

**Table 2: Indicative work plan**

	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Background Research	■											
1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting: Ongoing TG work & TG meeting	■			★ (Nov 19)								
2 <sup>nd</sup> Meeting: Ongoing TG work & TG meeting			■			★ (Jan- tbc)						
3 <sup>rd</sup> Meeting: Ongoing TG work & TG meeting						■		★ (Mar- tbc)				
4 <sup>th</sup> Meeting: Ongoing TG work & TG meeting								■		★ (Jun-tbc)		
<b>TG Outputs</b>	■											
Meeting highlights				▲			▲		▲		▲	
Smart Villages Portal: Ongoing development and update	■											
Capacity Building tools	■							▲				
TG Summary report											■	▲