

Highlights of the Smart Village Strategy of Penela Rural Innovation Villages Portugal



About Ferraria de São João

The Municipality of Penela has a population of about 5 983 inhabitants. It is located in the district of Coimbra, in the Centro region of Portugal.

Ferraria de São João is a schist village located in this municipality, remotely located on the top of a mountain. It has 43 inhabitants, of which only 9% are under 20 years old. The village offers a high quality of life to its inhabitants.

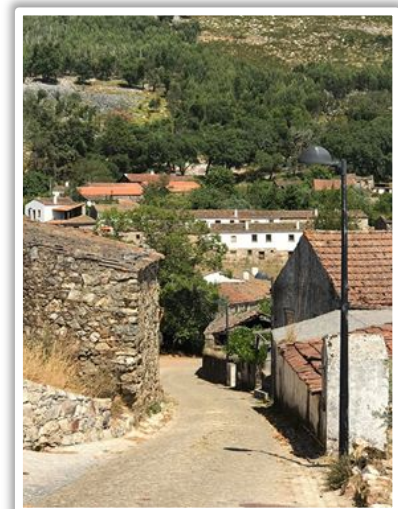
Apart from the exceptional features related to the environmental and built heritage, the village provides access to health, education, culture and leisure due to its proximity to the town of Penela and the city of Coimbra (at a distance of 15 and 39 km, respectively).

In addition, it has a local community that, although ageing, takes a very active role in the decision-making process of village development. In the last years, the village has registered increasing levels of investment in the tourism and agriculture sectors.

Key challenges & assets

Depopulation and ageing are the most significant challenges that the village is facing and the most relevant for defining a smart strategy. The progressive loss of population and high ageing rate entail other challenges such as low economic activity, lack of scale in primary production to enable competitiveness and absence of markets for its quality products. Besides, the territory is at a high risk of forest fires. The sum of these challenges results in a lack of capacity to attract new residents and capable human resources.

In relation to its key assets, Ferraria de São João stands out for the high-quality of life it offers to its inhabitants due to the natural setting and the ability to mobilise voluntary work, namely through initiatives associated with tourism (voluntourism). In what regards the economic scenario, the village has been showing an increasing dynamism in the touristic, agricultural and forestry sectors, closely linked to the sustainable use of the endogenous resources and the recovery and valorisation of local traditions.



Strategic objectives of smart village strategy

Objective 1: Preserving and protecting. Focuses on enhancing the natural heritage of the village and the surrounding territory, and, subsequently, on enhancing its rural and community identity, as well as the intergenerational dialogue based on traditional values.

Objective 2: Integrating. Mainly aimed at creating new cultural, social and entertainment activities that enhance the integration between residents and tourists, strengthening social and territorial cohesion and reinforcing social and cultural dynamics.

Objective 3: Rehabilitating. Focused on improving the built-up environment through the requalification of public space and facilities, endowing the needed conditions for the population and creating conditions for the attraction and fixation of new residents and investors.

Objective 4: Valuing the territory. Focuses on enhancing the local identity, through the recovery of village assets and immaterial heritage, considered a fundamental resource for the development of the local economy.

Objective 5: Dynamising and boosting the economy. Focuses on enhancing and supporting investment in local economy, contributing to the sustainable development of the village, population wellbeing, the decline of the depopulation trend and leveraging regional development.

What is smart?

The vision comprehended in the smart strategy and respective development was built on a bottom-up approach led and moderated by the Association of Residents of Ferraria de São João.

This approach embraced the close and enthusiastic collaboration between the village's inhabitants and the City Council, and the participation in regular meetings in the village common space. This process also counted with the contribution of the consistent involvement of touristic agents and other public and private entities. In these meetings, everyone had the opportunity to identify the problems, concerns and needs, as well as to suggest and discuss the most appropriate initiatives to address the identified challenges.

Specifically regarding the implementation phase, there has been a close and fruitful collaboration with two bodies acting as incubators for the development of ideas and of business innovation in the strategic sectors of the territory.

Links to other strategies

The smart strategy derives mainly from two wide-ranging instruments:

- ✓ The **Director Programme of Innovation, Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship for the Municipality of Penela**, which assumes the vision "Local resources at the service of innovation, innovation at the service of local resources", focusing on local singularities as competitive advantages for the sustainable development of the territory.
- ✓ The **Strategic Programme for Sustainable Development 2020**, which is a general instrument framing the development of the municipality for the period 2014-2020, being aligned with the premises of the EU2020 Strategy, of the Partnership Agreement PT2020, the Regional Operational Programme of the Region Centro, and the Strategic Development Plan for the Region of Coimbra.
- ✓ As to existing local strategies, the intervention for the village's sustainable development follows the **Strategic Programme for Urban Rehabilitation** and the **Structured Action Plan 'Ferraria Live Village'**. The former aims to intervene in an integrated manner over the existing built surface (public space)

- ✓ allowing for the improvement of infrastructures and equipment of collective use. The latter aims to affirm tourism as a lever for the economic, social and environmental development of the village.
- ✓ In addition, FSJ is covered by the Territory of intervention of the **Local Action Group (LAG) Terras de Sicó** and that the mentioned strategic documents are perfectly framed within the scope of the respective Local Development Strategy, particularly with regard to the objective of “Competitiveness: Dynamising and diversifying the local economy”.

What smart actions are implemented and planned?

- **Creation of a Village Protection Zone (VPZ):** aims to prevent and, thus, protect the village and its community against forest fires. It consisted in the replacement of highly combustible forest species (eucalyptus) with more fire-resistant native trees in a 200-metre strip around the village. This initiative has become an example at the national level.
- **Construction of a community shelter:** aims to protect the village community from forest fires. It is the first collective shelter to be designed to withstand fire and cyclonic winds and to be self-sufficient for a certain period of time.
- **Construction of a community goat centre:** aims to revitalise the production and marketing of *Cheese Rabaçal* (Protected Designation of Origin). It consists in the recovery of the existing community pens and also aims to promote traditional practices, stimulate rural and social tourism and lower the risk of rural fires by reducing the fuel load through grazing.
- **Promotion of the online platform FarmReal:** its main objective is to create a basis of sustainably recreating a community herd with the support of new technologies. Through the platform, it is possible to adopt a goat and observe its daily life.

A smart action that we are planning...

Boost FarmReal implementation

This online platform aims to contribute to the revitalisation, preservation and sustainability of a traditional activity with social and economic significance on the territory of Ferraria de São João: goat milk production and cheese making (*Rabaçal Cheese*).

The initiative aims to recreate a community herd on the basis of a business model partially sustained via crowd funding: social investors will be able to adopt goats, contributing to the sustainability of animal production and the preservation of the grazing of traditional practices, given the possibility to compensate the shepherds. Additional objectives include reduction of forest biomass through grazing and increase of attractiveness of sheep and goat herding.

Platform development status: 'pilot' (<https://farmreal.pt>; <https://farmreal.pt/en>)



Prototype