

LEADER cooperation project
Smart Villages
training programme

February 2022

Name	Estonian National Smart Villages Programme
Level of implementation	national
Period	01 January 2021-31 December 2022
Policy context/source of funding	LEADER national cooperation project, financed by LEADER programme (EAFRD), 13 LAGs, 24 villages
Amount of funding (EUR)	€ 251,928

Main objectives

- The [network of Estonian Smart Villages](#) and connections with the international network of Smart Villages (Smart Rural 21) will be established;
- Each participating village/region prepares a Smart Village Strategy and Action Plan to be implemented – [24 strategies](#);
- Each participating village/region carries out innovative pilot actions – [24 pilot actions](#);
- Through [communication activities](#), the process of creating Smart Village strategies and success stories on pilot actions will be introduced to the general public in Estonia via regular and social media and also through international networks and partners;
- The [LEADER Local Action Groups are gaining experience](#) on how to implement the concept of Smart Villages at the local level and can plan follow-up activities for the new programming period 2021-2027.

24 villages/13 LEADER areas

- ★ Luunja vald
- ★ Meeri küla
- ★ Navi küla
- ★ Purtse küla
- ★ Taheva piirkond
- ★ Otepää valla külad
- ★ Taevaskoja küla
- ★ Uuesalu küla
- ★ Neeme küla
- ★ Lubja küla
- ★ Kilingi-Nõmme piirkond
- ★ Eassalu-Neitsi külade piirkond
- ★ Venevere-Paasvere-Laekvere...
- ★ Vajangu piirkond
- ★ Kiltsi-Ebavere-Väike-Maarja
- ★ Lääne-Harju kogukond
- ★ Kuremaa alevik
- ★ Kääpa küla
- ★ Kriilevälja küla
- ★ Ravila küla
- ★ Kose-Uuemõisa alevik
- ★ Virtsu
- ★ Koeru piirkond
- ★ Rohelise Jõemaa külad
- ★ Kamari

Tegevusgrupid

- 📍 Tartumaa Arendusselts
- 📍 Pärnu-Lahe Partnerluskogu
- 📍 Valgamaa Partnerluskogu
- 📍 Lääne-Harju Koostöökogu
- 📍 Jõgevamaa Koostöökoda
- 📍 Võrumaa Partnerluskogu
- 📍 Järva Arengu Partnerid
- 📍 PAIK
- 📍 Ida-Harju Koostöökoda
- 📍 Põlvamaa Partnerluskogu
- 📍 Rohelise Jõemaa Koostöökogu
- 📍 Põhja-Harju Koostöökogu
- 📍 Virumaa Koostöökogu



Partners

- 13 LAGs and 24 villages
- Estonian national working group on Smart Villages –
 - Ministry of Rural Affairs
 - Ministry of Social Affairs
 - Estonian Rural Network
 - Estonian LEADER Union
 - Estonian Village Movement
 - Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities
 - Still to be included – Ministry of Environment, Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Lessons learned: main success factors

Success factors	Short explanation
Participatory process	Participant villages organised involvement of community into the preparation of the Smart Villages strategy. Throughout the process their ability and skills to involve local community improved.
Innovative thinking	Training programme included inspirational examples from other countries and other areas of Estonia as well as expert support.
Involving mentor support	Each village could use up to 5 days mentoring support to organise village meetings, surveys, prepare the strategy, etc.
Networking with other villages	Networking and knowledge exchange were enabled throughout the programme. In the middle of the strategy development process, villages presented their state of play, their strategic focuses and innovations. This enabled mutual learning about strategy preparation.

Lessons learned: main bottlenecks

Bottlenecks	Short explanation
Limited number of face-to-face meetings	Due to COVID-19 situation it was difficult to organise the process with limited face-to-face gatherings. Very often it was necessary to use e-solutions for meetings and collection of information. It caused a situation where some people couldn't participate.
Missing definition and criteria of Smart Village at the beginning of the process	It was not defined very precisely what a Smart Village is; it was a rather flexible approach because there is no elaborated definition established in Estonia yet.
Level of capacity is very different in different villages	There are 24 villages/regions in the programme and there are remarkable differences in understanding, know-how, capacity to prepare and implement a Smart Village strategy.
Smart Village concept is very new	The concept is very new and people are not familiar with it. It is learning by doing.
Innovation	Sometimes it was difficult to merge innovations. In each training it was highlighted that innovation is very important: What is new/innovative, what is planned to be done to implement innovative approaches? What is 'smart' for the village? These were questions often asked throughout the process repeatedly.

Transferability

- Prepare a [LEADER cooperation project](#) and organise a call for villages to participate in the programme.
- [6 training modules](#) on different topics (social innovation, digitalization, greening solutions, networking and people involvement, urban-rural cooperation, cross-border service development, local marketing and attracting people to the region, smart transport and logistics solutions, self-sufficiency and business services).
- [2-day study trip](#) in the country and [5-day study trip abroad](#).
- Implementation of [pilot activities](#) – each village carries out at least one pilot activity set out in the strategy, receiving a grant of € 5,000. The pilot action will be selected during the preparation of the strategy.
- [Mentoring support](#) – each village gets its own mentor. A total of 5 working days of mentoring support has been calculated for each village. In addition it is possible to use expert knowledge according to the needs of villages.
- [Communication and information activities](#) – sub-page of Smart Villages on the national LEADER Union web and on Facebook, articles, sharing information on good practices, sharing information with Estonian and the international community.
- [Network coordination and project management](#) – coordination of all activities and information sharing, organizational issues. Coordination of cooperation with trainers, mentors, communities, international partners.

Main implications/most inspiring aspects

1. Communities are more active in local development and local level democracy has increased.
2. Local stakeholders have better knowledge about strategic planning and how to emerge innovative solutions.
3. Village lead group (group of villagers who steer the process of Smart Village strategy) capacity and skills to involve community and other partners have improved.
4. The quality of life on village level has improved due to new developments and innovative services developed in the frame of pilot actions.
5. Cooperation and networking between different villages are stronger which enables a good base for further cooperation activities and innovations.
6. Villages have increased their capacity to attract different funds to implement a Smart Village strategy.
7. Through communication activities other villages have been inspired and the know-how about the Smart Villages concept has been made visible and accessible to the public.
8. LAGs have gained experience on the Smart Villages concept implementation on local level and have prepared necessary improvements for LDS and funding mechanism for communities to support the development of innovative solutions.

Criteria/key aspects of Estonian smart villages

- **Coherence of strategy** – The strategy of the Smart Village clearly outlines the region's strengths, challenges, development opportunities and the resulting long-term vision, goals and action plan. The focus (s) of the strategy have been defined.
- **Smartness and innovation** – The strategy of the Smart Village clearly states what kind of innovation the community implements, including the aspects of technological, digital and social innovation and the activities that are planned to reach this innovation.
- **Participatory approach** – A participatory approach is a key feature of Smart Villages. The strategy of a Smart Village is based on the active participation of the community. The strategy clearly describes the process of community involvement and the inputs from local people.
- **Cooperation** – Cooperation with various partners is clearly highlighted and planned cooperation activities at the local, national and, if possible, international level are described.
- **Linkages with other strategic documents and actions** – Based on the focus of the strategy, the most important strategic documents and measures are presented, as well as the main sources of funding are described. In developing Smart Village strategies, communities are encouraged to seek synergies with other local (e.g. local government, LEADER LAG), regional, national (and even European) actors and strategic partners.
- **Capacity building of local community** – Activities to support community learning and capacity building are clearly outlined in the Smart Village Strategy, including a plan for training and outreach activities.

Main implications/most inspiring aspects

The intervention supports further development of the Smart Villages approach in Estonia. **The Estonian CAP strategic plan foresees the Smart Villages approach implementation under LEADER/CLLD.** Therefore the intervention provided very good experience and base to build on the next steps.

Implementing the national programme, Estonian LAGs received experience on the Smart Village approach. **Currently LAGs are improving their LDS for the 2021-2027 period where specific attention and new support measures will be designed for Smart Village actions.**

Questions to discuss

- How to proceed with defining SV definition on national level?
- Should be there a standard for SV? What should be done to keep that standard, quality and not to devalue the approach?
- What can be done to increase the networking possibilities of Smart Villages across Europe?
- How to strengthen innovation capacity on local level?

Thank you!

More information <https://leaderliit.eu/arukad-kulad/>

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