



## **WORKSHOP REPORT OF WORKSHOP SERIES 1**

### **How to breathe new life into old buildings? – Community buildings & community engagement (1/3)**



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## TITLE OF WORKSHOP: How to breathe new life into old buildings? – Community buildings & community engagement (1/3)

Facilitator: Ed Thorpe (E40)

Rapporteur: Andrzej Halasiewicz (E40 National Expert)

Notetaker: Balogh Anita (E40)

### BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

Several Smart Rural 21 communities have been concerned with transforming and constructing – in a sustainable way – new community spaces. These included transforming part of an old fisheries site into a community space in Estonia, transforming an old school building into a community centre & small demonstration animal farm in Finland, planning further developments to make a new community building functional in Slovenia, transforming an old mill into an incubator space in Spain. Whatever the transformation is about, the main concern is how to breathe new life into these newly reconstructed old buildings and engage the community to take ownership.



### PRESENTATIONS

#### [Nives Lahnar, Sentviska Gora How to breath new life into old buildings](#)

The presentation talked about the challenges (elderly people, lack of active population, empty houses, no activities for young people and children) and the idea that came up to provide a solution for all the existing challenges: a **new multigenerational community building**. Based on a survey conducted among the population of Sentviska the needs were assessed, conceptual design and architectural plan was prepared for the best use of the center with SR21 support. The main challenges in implementing the building was finding the funding and bring together an active community who is willing to work together on the project.



### [Annina Airola, Raudnamaa How we transformed an old school building into a community center?](#)

Annina talked about the challenges to create the community building. First challenge was the funding. Smart Rural 21 project provided architect to plan what renovations need to be done and how to make the building work. Second challenge was expensive employees. In every step had to think how to survive with voluntary workers and how many employees can be hired. Once the community building was ready, an automated (Asio) system was created so people can get in and out even if there is no one in the building. Activities created in the building: kids farm, off-season school trips to the animal farm, events to be organised (to make money as well), food fair with 2000 visitors. Conclusion: Successful project needs good ideas, enthusiastic committed people and resources.



### [Video message of Paul Hendriksen \(Initiator of the Earthship Community in the Netherlands\)](#)

The focus of this session has been the “Earthship Idea” and how to transfer it to other rural communities. Through the Earthship Project a series of sustainable eco-houses have been built where the “house is taking care of you instead of you taking care of the house”. Paul talked about their project as well as visiting and sharing their experience with Ostoja Natury (Tomaszyn, Poland) – an activity supported by the Smart Rural 21 project. Ostoja is planning to invest in an eco-building planning and construction that is functioning in the same way as the Earthship village in the Netherlands-the plans of the earthship project is ready and transferable to Ostoja

## FINDINGS ON CHALLENGES

- One of the main challenges generally is to find **funding**
- However, just, if not more important than funding, is **filling buildings with people. Creating cooperation among people** and finding an active community,
- Involve people in **voluntary work** – and realise that at some point you may need to pay someone – people get sick of doing basic jobs e.g. cleaning as volunteers
- Communication and **changing peoples’ mind**

*“ At some point, somebody has to clean the toilets.”*

*Peter Plant (Torup, Denmark)*



## FINDINGS ON SOLUTIONS

- **Transforming building means transforming peoples’ minds.**
- A **good design** is essential – based on the specific needs and preferences of the community. What makes a good design is locally specific.
- We need **to use what we have** (e.g. existing buildings) instead of building new ones

- **Engaging people** is the key
- Connecting all the generations, **assessing needs of people**, listen to them on what they need

Solutions from other countries discussed during the event included:

- [Scattered hotel \(Italy\)](#) – an example included in also in the Smart Rural 21 smart solutions database.
- Francisco Carneiro (Village representative of Villa Boa, Portugal): They had an old school building nobody was using



it, and finally they set up a shelter for animals. First everybody was

*“ You can only change the buildings as fast as people’s minds can change.”*

*Francisco Carneiro (Portugal, participant)*

opposing the idea but after good communication, it was accepted, and it is still working.

- Peter Plant (Denmark): Dairy farm was transformed into a concert hall
- Ministry of Poland (Poland) ‘My little village’

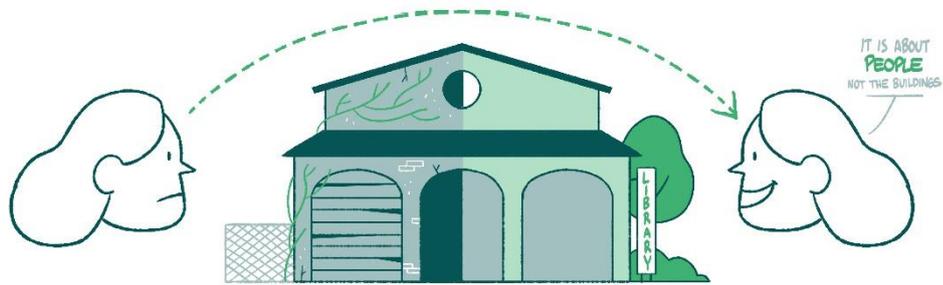
competition was launched to collect ideas from a bottom up approach and supporting it from the top

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, NEXT STEPS

Key messages:

- *“You can only change the buildings as fast as people’s minds can change.”*
- Breathing new life into community buildings is about engaging people in identifying what is needed, contributing to the design of the solution and starting to use the new building.
- Funding is essential, but it is the people that bring the life to the building.
- Starting point is to **listen to people**
- **Communication** is very important, the key challenge is how to engage the community
- **Taking the leadership** and sense on what people want to do
- **Planning the space** before starting it to use (based on the feedback of local society)
- It’s not about the building itself but the contents of the building, **it’s not only the renovation of the building but the renovation of the local society**. You need to think what local people need what you can re-use and if something is missing you need to fill the gap.
- **It takes time to change people** (and the way they are thinking)
- We can change buildings as fast as minds of the people are changing.

## HOW TO **BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO OLD BUILDINGS?** – COMMUNITY BUILDINGS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



You can only change the buildings as fast as the minds can change.



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