WORKSHOP REPORT OF WORKSHOP SERIES 2

Enabling a supportive framework for Smart Villages through the Smart Rural 27 project – How to get involved? (2/1)

European Commission

TITLE OF WORKSHOP: Enabling a supportive framework for Smart Villages through the Smart Rural 27 project – How to get involved? (2/1)

Facilitator: Hans-Olof Stalgren (Smart Rural 27 National Expert, Sweden)

Discussant: Andrzej Halasiewicz (Smart Rural 27 National Expert, Poland)

Notetaker: Hans-Olof Stalgren & Edina Ocsko, E40

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

The workshop aimed to present and explore with the participants how the Smart Rural 27 project – a continuation of Smart Rural 21 – can benefit the most rural communities and how stakeholders from different levels can get engaged in the Smart Rural 27 (SR27) work. The SR27 project is focusing on creating a supportive policy environment for Smart Villages in various Member States, that is mostly achieved through setting up policy / Smart Villages support taskforces that eventually will grow into the European Smart Villages Pilot Observatory. Among others the Smart Rural 27 project aims at sharing information about smart rural communities across Europe (including their profiles and smart solutions).

PRESENTATIONS

Edina Ocsko (*SR27 Coordinator, E40):* [Experience of working with the Smart Rural 21 villages](#)

Edina Ocsko presented the Smart Rural 27 project and its objectives, with special focus on setting up a European Smart Villages Pilot Observatory. She highlighted the importance of Smart Rural 27 taskforces that are set up in interested Member States to advance a specific policy or other support instrument for Smart Villages. Examples of taskforces were mentioned from Belgium, Cyprus and Bulgaria. The presentation also highlighted the challenges of Smart Villages policies, namely the relatively limited programming efforts in Member States on Smart Villages in the CAP, the fact that other ministries and programmes know little about Smart Villages, there is lack of cooperation between different ministries and programmes, and the need to start from the bottom-up in those cases where there is no real openness to support Smart Villages at the regional and/or national levels.

Makis Papamichael *(SR National Expert):* [Smart Rural 27 – Smart Villages Taskforce in Cyprus](#)

Makis Papamichael presented the work of the Smart Rural 27 Taskforce in Cyprus. He talked about the novelty of Smart Villages concept in Cyprus and the need to define the concept better in the national context and start influencing CAP and other policy interventions. There are various interventions that could benefit Smart Villages but the bits of the puzzle need to be brought together. The main purposes of the taskforce include bringing relevant stakeholders together, working on a national Smart Village definition and advancing specific measures in the CAP and other policies, at the same time building capacity with relevant stakeholders. The membership of the taskforce in Cyprus is very diverse with stakeholders from all levels and different sectors. In the taskforce synergies are thought with the Smart Cities concept as well as the Ministry for Innovation.

KEY QUESTIONS

The Discussant addressed some key questions to the Presenters to kick of the discussion and additional questions have been asked by participants, including:

- How to involve the political level in the concept when the definition of Smart Villages is relatively vague? How national definitions can be agreed and what if they differ from the European definition? Is there a risk that it excludes some villages?

- What is the difference between Smart Villages and LEADER?

- What are the connections to Smart Cities? Which components can be used in rural areas?

- Who will be responsible for Smart Villages and who will fund it?

- How Smart Rural 27 will continue working with communities?

MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS: DILEMMAS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- **Smart Villages definition**: There is scope to define Smart Villages in the national context. For instance in Cyprus a definition was created by the taskforce with a focus also on smart agriculture. The question is whether such definition is acceptable for all (especially non-agricultural rural stakeholders) and whether the taskforce has the mandate /representative enough to develop such definitions. The expert highlighted that the definition has been created based on a broad consensus among a diverse set of stakeholders, and still needs to be formally adapted in the programming in Cyprus. It has a focus on agriculture but it also covers other thematic areas. The question generally remains on "Who can say whether a village is "smart"?" Social innovation definition is sometimes too soft of vague (does not always help to define what is "smart").

- **"Smart Village" as a label**: The label of "smart" can function as an attractive thing/ trigger for villages.

> *"Smart is rather a process than a "state". You can always be smarter."*
>
> *Workshop participant*

- **Programming & financing**: This largely remains a responsibility of Member States at the moment and therefore, the programming in the

CAP and beyond needs to be followed closely to see how Smart Villages support framework evolves. One needs to consider what happens in countries where CAP or other policies might not support Smart Villages (at the same time there are often other national/ regional programmes that provide similar support). One solution might be to consider providing extra points in the selection of projects when they are integrated in Smart Village strategies. The Smart Villages is a territorial concept that should be supported by regional policy (maybe even more than sectoral policies).

In Cyprus, it might be the Ministry of Innovation that takes responsibility for managing and supporting the concept (extending the scope of Smart Cities, covering rural areas and communities).

▪ **Lack of financing**: Public financing takes time, and the needs of the communities might change by the time of accessing funding. Alternatives need to be thought of, such as crowdfunding and foundations. National experts (SR27) could have a role to help identifying relevant funding for communities. Multi-funding approach should also be a focal point of the taskforces.

▪ **LEADER & Smart Villages**: Although they build on the same principles, there are also differences between the two concepts. Smart Villages act more at the local community level (LEADER is active at a higher geographical level). LEADER funding is relatively limited, Smart Villages should attract more and other sources of funding. Finally, Smart Villages have the potential to re-emphasise the importance of innovation (technological and social) in local communities and "think out of the box".

▪ **Continue working with smart communities**: It is a key question how we continue from Smart Rural 21 (that supported communities) to Smart Rural 27. There is a need for continued working with villages/ rural communities. How can we ensure this through Smart Rural 27? Village with similar challenges or thematic interests would need to be brought together. Communities who got "tired" need inspiration from others. Communities need different kinds of support at different stages of their development.

Practical (capacity-building) support from networks is needed beyond "advocacy" role. The Smart Villages Observatory should continue working with communities.

▪ **Communication platform for the Observatory**: Not easy to find the right communication platform. Smart Rural 27 is experimenting with this. Some people don't like the common platforms like Facebook. Personal contacts are needed first.

KEY MESSAGE & NEXT STEP

Key message delivered at the plenary:

„We need a multi-funding solution so all EU programmes and national funding schemes can contribute to the development of Smart Villages. Connect the silos."

Further main messages:

- Need to keep experimenting with new funding schemes, programmes, measures, etc.; providing communities who are engaged in Smart Villages process with additional resources. Other policy areas need to be mobilised (such as the Ministry of Innovation in Cyprus).
- Networks should provide practical support (capacity-building and connecting villages) beyond the "advocacy" role.

- The Smart Rural 27 should continue working with the communities.
- There is a need to create knowledge transfer/ mutual learning between communities who work on similar themes (have similar characteristics).
- It needs further consideration how practical it is to have a diverse set of national definitions, and who has the mandate to create such definitions and tell which rural community is "smart".

ENABLING A SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR SMART VILLAGES THROUGH **THE SMART RURAL 27 PROJECT** – HOW TO GET INVOLVED?

We need a multi funding solution so all EU-programs and national funding schemes can contribute to the development of Smart Villages. Connect the silos.

FINAL CONFERENCE OF THE **SMART RURAL 21 PROJECT**

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