



WORKSHOP REPORT OF WORKSHOP SERIES 2

LEADER and Smart Villages – Are they competing or complementing each other? (2/2)



Contract No AGRI-2019-409 supported by the European Union contributed to the results presented in this document. The opinions expressed are those of the contractor only and do not represent the Contracting Authority's official position

TITLE OF WORKSHOP: LEADER and Smart Villages – Are they competing or complementing each other? (2/2)

Facilitator: Kirsten Birke Lund, SR-21 Coordinator Denmark

Discussant: Robert Lukesch

Notetaker: Kim Smedslund, SR-21 Expert Finland & Suomen kylät

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

The workshop aimed to explore how LEADER is different from Smart Villages and how the two concepts can support and complement each other (rather than compete) for the common goal of strengthening community-led local development approaches. Smart Villages is often compared to LEADER in terms of its community-led local development approach, territorial approach and innovation. This often raises the question of how the Smart village concept is different from the LEADER approach. Many argue that Smart Villages should be implemented within the LEADER framework, and in fact, many Member States also follow this approach in their CAP-strategic Plans.

PRESENTATIONS

Peter Plant, Torup Village, LAG Halsnæs-Gribskov: [LEADER & Smart Villages implementation in Rural Communities – the experience of Smart Rural 21 Village Torup](#)

The LEADER methodology and principles were presented through examples in an analytical way. The bottom-up approach, inclusiveness, innovativeness, networking and partnerships were considered as key elements in the methodology not serving only to finance projects but as well supporting policy development.

Bureaucracy, restrictive regulations and at some level a lack of capacities were considered as limiting the beneficial implementation of LEADER. In the Evaluation Support Study on the Impact of LEADER on Balanced Territorial Development (2021) complexity was emphasised notably through a mix of measures, policy differences and different levels of communication outreach.



Kristiina Tammets, Tartu LAG & ELARD: [Synergies of LEADER & Smart Villages – The experience of the Estonian Smart Villages training with LAGs](#)

In Estonia an open call for training programme on smart villages was launched. The ministry promoted it and the process supported by a multi-actor platform and steering group including ministries (others to be included), the Estonian Rural Network, the LEADER Union, the Estonian Village movement Kodukant and the

association of Estonian cities and municipalities. The purpose in the still ongoing process is to build capacities in village development through strategies. All 24 participant villages finalised their strategies and pilot actions were implemented.

As results capacities, innovative thinking, involvement skills, networking and communication skills increased among participants. As to bottlenecks were mentioned the lack of capacities and resources as well as a lack of understanding of the smart village definition.

[Michael Fisher, Austrian NRN & SR21 National Expert: Implementing Smart Villages as a tool for LEADER - CAP-Period 2023-2027](#)

There is a clear recommendation to include the Smart Villages concept and implementation in LEADER strategies in Austria. Neither beneficiaries nor themes are restricted. Digitalisation should play a role, understood as means to an end. The concept of Smart Villages can be considered as a tool to address local challenges with the support of LAG managers with a potential to more integrated approaches. The concept is connected to two other CAP-instruments in Austria, namely “Strengthening of village and town centres” and “Rural Innovation systems”. No other structures are needed. As for the rural innovation systems, innovative actions are to bring added values and be implemented through EIP-type partnerships and innovation networks.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Do you have any justification why Smart Villages could not be implemented through LEADER alone?
- How would Smart Villages work without LEADER?
- What if the LEADER programme was not there – how would we then implement the Smart Village concept? What structures would we need to put in place?
- How LEADER and Smart Villages could be complementary and coordinated to trigger additional benefits?

MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS: DILEMMAS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In a world with just LEADER...

The LEADER programme was broadly seen as an appropriate tool to implement Smart Villages activities. Local development strategies can take into account the diversity of local contexts. LAGs could provide support, animation, activating, capacity building and project funding. The “innovation element” could be scaled to village level (as understood in the Smart Villages concept). In today’s LEADER, some changes could be thought of to fully serve the villages:

- Village development and strategies should be included in the LAG strategies
- Mainstreaming may be needed as LEADER does not cover all rural areas in the EU
- Financing easy access partnership models for villages
- Indicators should be adapted to smaller village level projects, not solely based on growth or economy
- Less bureaucracy and flexible regulations to allow innovative thinking and results.



In a world without LEADER...

We would need to rely on national rural programmes and policies. The situation would be even more fragmented in the EU. It would largely depend on how villages are included in the national or decentralised structures or ecosystems. Regions and municipalities may have a leading role. Self-commitment and responses to challenges will also in the future be found at village level.

In a world where LEADER and Smart Village work together...

We would need to define the (“applicant”) village in LEADER in a flexible way to reflect the diversity of contexts and village types. The innovations and smart solutions may need to cross village borders or be part of a larger “place”. Community of practices or interest may also be eligible. Partnership and CLLD structures or ecosystems would be in place combined with simpler village participation and funding schemes. “Umbrella” projects including villages as partners could get additional funding if the required conditions are fulfilled. Capacity building resources would be available in LEADER groups.

KEY MESSAGE & NEXT STEP

Short summary of additional findings & next steps:

- LEADER acts at sub-regional level; Smart Villages at local, even more grassroots level.
- In principle both are complementary and synergetic if well co-designed, duly avoiding competition among protagonists
- It’s about harnessing the potential of Smart Villages without squandering the achievements of LEADER – which mainly lie in its functioning as a governance hinge between representative, deliberative and participative democracy, an institutional shell/mechanism enabling (particularly social) innovation within its geographical remit. Smart Villages could be a mould and a vehicle for these innovations.

LEADER AND SMART VILLAGES – ARE THEY COMPETING OR COMPLEMENTING EACH OTHER?



Notwithstanding the indisputable merits of CLLD/LEADER which have evolved through the past thirty years in many ways and forms, SV opens a window for innovative actions and broader involvement and empowerment of local people, ultimately leading to rejuvenating the LEADER method.



FINAL CONFERENCE OF THE
SMART RURAL 21 PROJECT

