# WORKSHOP REPORT OF WORKSHOP SERIES 2

## Building trust & engagement - How local elected leaders can help making their villages 'smart'? (2/3)

TITLE OF WORKSHOP: Building trust & engagement - How local elected leaders can help making their villages 'smart'? (2/3)

Facilitator: Pat Kennedy, eTownz, SR National Expert

Discussant: Fritz Pichler (Mayor of Stanz, Austria)

Notetaker: Zsófia Vidák, E40

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

This session aimed to explore how elected local leaders can facilitate the Smart Villages process in their communities, and how they collaborate with local community members to achieve strategic objectives. The local environment and the role of elected leaders is continuously changing and rural communities are vulnerable to changes in local governance. New elections can change the local dynamics, some previous connections might be lost and new ones have to be built, trust needs to be "regained" with some local inhabitants. This puts under huge challenge not only the community but also committed local leaders. How elected leaders can build trust and support the Smart Villages process? How can they engage community members and which segments of the community can and need to be mobilised? How financing can be accessed for smart actions at the local level? How to prioritise between projects? These are some of the questions that this workshop will explore.

## PRESENTATIONS

Eduardo Santos, Mayor of Penela (Portugal): Becoming a mayor in Penela



Eduardo presented different projects in their village ("senior living" concept, village protection zone) and the successes and challenges faced. He saw the main challenge in the lack of engagement (between citizens and the NGO), communication, involvement and ownership. He also presented some local activities (workshops of traditional skills) and an online platform (FarmReal) where you can invest in "goats herds" with animals monitored with sensors. These projects reflect their aim of addressing the issues by using circular economy and digital technology solutions.

Silvia Rovere (Ostana, Italy): Challenges and rewards of being a mayor in Ostana



Silvia explained that she arrived to the village as an "outsider" before she became the mayor. She talked about the importance of building and nurturing the local community (Ostana historically had a strong community), building trust, listen to and learn about the residents' needs before starting any innovation. She believes in working with passion to "overcome the impossible". The SR21

project was a good opportunity for them to sit down and discuss about the real needs and innovation ideas. She thinks that the key to get trust from the people is to be "current", coherent (in a small village everyon e knows about everything) and demonstrate a clear plan and strategy.

## KEY QUESTIONS

Key questions raised by the discussant and other participants included:

- How do you balance self-interest and citizens' involvement?

- Is Smart Village a new definition of municipality?

- How do you deal with the shortage of money?

- How do you build capacity to write good applications?

- (How) do you involve locals in the decision-making?

- How to deal with disrespectful people?

## MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS: DILEMMAS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- **Sharing the same vision**: Sometimes the money is there but there are no ideas. The Ostana projects are successful because they are "full of life" - the manager of the cooperative invests in the projects even when the people are struggling with moving forward, because they "share the same vision and language". External people often do not have sufficient commitment to carry through with



developments in the village. For instance, the investor of the shelter in Penela was an external person, with no real connection with the locals (project still nor approved/nor implemented). One of the challenges is to combine strategic vision with the needs of the population

- **It is difficult to write successful applications for projects**, the competition is high and the capacity is limited (for instance in Ostana they only have 1 person for this task). Suggestions are to try to select projects mindfully (focusing on proximity), involve citizens into the decision-making as much as possible and try to be creative. It is important to bring together people who have the same interest.

- ▪ **Networking, collaborating with other villages is important**. In Ostana during Covid they discovered and built partnerships with other villages that share the same vision but feeling out of the scope of the local politics (as mountain villages). Villages need to collaborate and get a better representation on national political level. Importance of being able to collaborate without ideologies.



It is important to build collaboration with urban areas.

- ▪ **Locals' involvement**:

  - o Ostana: building on voluntary work - each family works on something each weekend, then they have lunch and drinks together, some families open their kitchen where people can gather. They also have weekly meetings. You need to be very focused and clear on the strategy, and explain clearly the benefits of it, and also need to demonstrate a good example. If that`s successful and people start to engage, the majority will organically rule out the minority.

  - o Penela: working with 2 voluntary associations (mainly mayors from the villages of the area). Conflict can be a good thing and needed to move forward and evolve, but it needs to be managed. Autonomy is still a strong value in their village, he is trying to change it by being approachable and inclusive, but it is difficult (people need a leader).

> *"Women are often better in resolving conflicts. It is difficult to navigate if you are only women against many men."*
>
> *Workshop participant*

## KEY MESSAGE & NEXT STEP

Key message delivered at the plenary:

*„Elected representative need to work with passion, demonstrate a clear vision and side-by side and an inclusive manner with local communities"*

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