



WORKSHOP REPORT OF WORKSHOP SERIES 2

How regional policies & smart ecosystems support Smart Villages? (2/5)



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TITLE OF WORKSHOP: How regional policies & smart ecosystems support Smart Villages? (2/5)

Facilitator: Lutz Kubitschke, empirica: Communications and Technology Research

Discussants: Fernando Merida Martin, European Commission Joint Research Centre – Seville

Notetaker: Emese Ocsko, E40 Group

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

This session aimed to explore how regions can use key (EU) policy instruments to support rural areas and communities within their territories, and how local rural communities can get engaged. Local rural communities are embedded in a larger regional ecosystem. For instance, various services are often most efficiently provided at a regional scale. Regional governments have an important responsibility for “taking care” of rural communities and their needs within their territories and not to leave local communities and lagging areas behind. There are several regional level (territorial) policy instruments that can support integrated territorial development at regional and local levels, including ITI (Integrated Territorial Investment) and ‘Smart Specialisation’ strategies.

PRESENTATIONS

Marcos Nogueira (AURORAL H2020 Project): [Architecture for undefined regional and open digital ecosystems](#)

Marcos made his presentation as a representative of a Portuguese region (Alentejo). At the same time he presented the relevance of the AURORAL project for the regional context. Among others he presented the AURORAL approach, including the need for “Enhanced cooperation and stronger communication and interaction among stakeholders within and between regions”. In AURORAL they are working in 8 European regions to realise cost-efficient and flexible cross-domain applications through large-scale pilots. Alentejo is one of the pilot regions. Regions have a key role to play and this should be reinforced from the EU level.



Jonathan Gomez Raja, (dRural Project/ Extremadura Region): [The Smart Ecosystem of Extremadura & how dRural \(Horizon 2020\) supports smart rural communities?](#)

Jonathan presented the dRural Service Marketplace that aims to connect the ecosystem of potential end-users and service providers in rural areas, delivering a broad spectrum of services while boosting economic growth and improving citizens’ quality of life. The project works in 9 countries, including the region of Extremadura in Spain. The Health Ecosystem in Extremadura was presented as an example,

and how digital technology enables interaction between relevant stakeholders (hospitals, community health centres, primary care and other centres, care professionals, etc.) for an improved service provision. The main objective is to extend the services provided by regional and public system to private health services.

KEY QUESTIONS

In the introduction Lutz Kubitschke formulated three main questions: How regions can involve politics? How can the activities at regional and local level can be connected? How can we the best align the different activities top down & bottom up? He suggested the triangle-thinking (EU-Regional-Local) as a useful approach. Fernando Merida Martin commented as a person who “has already sat on the two sides of the table”.

MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS: DILEMMAS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS



Often the regional level seems to be “distanced” from the village level (the challenge to connect the different administrative levels is even more pressing at national and European levels). More power should be devoted to the regional level so that policies and funds better reach down to citizens, and “transition officer” could be nominated to help create linkages between the different levels. It is the joint duty of **all policy levels to ensure equal living conditions** independently of where people

live.

A complete change of mindset is needed, moving towards a systemic way of thinking. LEADER LAGs has fulfilled in important role in connecting the micro-regional and local levels. The trust in LEADER should be re-established in a number of cases.

The speakers did not only represent the regional perspectives but are both involved in the **Horizon 2020 ICT projects on Smart Villages** (AURORAL and dRural). One of the main questions of these projects is how the findings & outcomes can be transmitted from the regional to the local level (to have a final economic impact).

“There’s no time to wait for the results, the geopolitical issues must be solved immediately.”

Both projects and regional perspectives highlighted the importance of developing a larger digital infrastructure on which regional as well as local stakeholders could run digitally supported services addressing local problems. Villages should be able to rely on such an infrastructure for accessing specific services at the local level. The “generic” digital infrastructure should be transferable to other countries and regions. Dedicated and contextualised services need to be then developed and run on such an infrastructure to address concrete local issues, but this is often challenging. The project aims to provide such examples.

“The examples presented can be good examples for villages facing the same difficulties.”

In order to create high-quality services at the local level, there is need for better exploiting innovation potentials and create cooperation among sectors.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, NEXT STEPS

There is a risk that the Smart Village concept will be ‘misused’ by putting the entire burden of local transitions on the shoulders of the villages. Villages are always embedded within larger processes and infrastructures - e.g. from an economic, regulatory and infrastructural point of view, which are shaped by decision-making at higher policy and administrative levels. They all have a duty to ensure equal living conditions throughout individual regions, countries and the European Union.

Successfully involving local communities into regional, national and even international policy development and implementation processes is not a straightforward task, for various reasons. For instance, nationally/internationally driven policy initiatives tend to have a longer time horizon when compared with locally driven initiatives.

The latter often requires delivering tangible outputs in a comparatively short time frame if as many local actors as possible are to be kept in the loop beyond an initial euphoria. Also, many local stakeholders tend to lack required capacities (e.g. time, skills, economic resources) to get involved.

BEYOND THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY - **HOW OTHER POLICIES,** INCLUDING COHESION POLICY, **SUPPORT SMART VILLAGES?**



Do not leave the villages alone in coping with required transitions.



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