After two Thematic Group (TG) 'labs' focusing on ideas for the support framework for Smart Villages in the future CAP Strategic Plans in Finland and Poland, the TG organised the last lab to provide space for other Member States to share ideas and pose questions about how they are proposing to support Smart Villages in their own countries. The Managing Authorities (MAs) of Austria, Ireland and Slovenia presented their ideas for supporting their villages through a dedicated framework in the CAP Strategic Plan. At the core of their proposal is the use of LEADER, cooperation, investments and the use of Simplified Cost Options.

## Smart Villages and the CAP Strategic Plans

Member States around Europe are discussing with stakeholders the future support framework for Smart Villages within the CAP Strategic Plans. **Austria**, **Ireland** and **Slovenia** presented their ideas in this TG Webinar and will add to those ideas already presented from **Finland** and **Poland**.

## Ideas for supporting Smart Villages in Austria

**Julian Gschnell (Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism)** introduced the key principles for programming Smart Villages in the future CAP. The scope for Smart Village will be thematically open to enable villages to implement action in a wide variety of areas. No additional structures or mechanisms will be created to support Smart Villages, while the existing ones will be reinforced to provide flexible support on the ground. The aim is to provide support at the local level (smaller scale than LEADER strategies) with cooperation and innovation being at the core. The initial idea is to define three main types of interventions in the CAP Strategic Plan: i) LEADER, art. 71, ii) Strengthening of towns and village centres, art. 68 & art. 71 iii) Regional innovation partnerships, art. 71.

### LEADER

Smart Villages is seen as a tool for Local Action Groups (LAGs) to address local challenges. LAGs will not be obliged to implement Smart Villages. Incentives will be provided for LAGs to support digitalisation and innovation. LAGs could design umbrella projects with a reserved budget for Smart Villages and then select the individual projects when submitted by local actors.

### Strengthening village & towns centres

The SWOT analysis has identified a need to develop integrated solutions for emptying village centres. Four modules will be designed in the intervention to support 1) awareness raising 2) creation of an integrated town/urban development concept in a regional context 3) promotion and vacancy/land use manager 4) investments for village development.
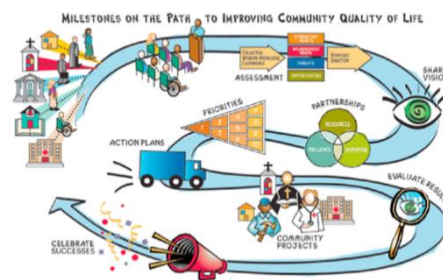
### Regional Innovation Partnerships

Existing Smart Regional Specialisation Strategies often do not reach SMEs. Inspired in the multi-actor approach of the EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, support will be provided to groups of local SMEs, value chains, public authorities and knowledge actors to network and develop innovation ecosystems at the local level.

## Ideas for supporting Smart Villages in Ireland

**Dympna Harney (Department of Rural and Community Development of Ireland)** explained the main ideas being discussed in Ireland to support Smart Villages in the future CAP SP. The key type of intervention will be LEADER, as currently the Irish LAGs have the capacity to support activities through multiple funding streams (national and EU) in a variety of areas. Smart Villages could be one of the areas supported in the future Local Development Strategies (LDS) if the LAGs decide this is a priority. The aim is to support the development of simple, flexible strategies at local level which identify the local assets (skills, infrastructure, natural capital, etc.) and prioritise key investments in villages or groups of villages. The strategy will provide a roadmap for the future of the village(s), supporting actions that respond to needs and ambitions of the community, rather than supporting projects based on the availability of funding. These Smart Villages Strategies could leverage in further support from other national or EU funding streams (e.g. by scoring higher in selection processes).

## Ideas for supporting Smart Villages in Slovenia

**Andreja Komel (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of Slovenia)** explained that their ideas are based on the SWOT analysis of CAP Specific objective 8, the online Survey on Smart villages carried out in May 2020 and the National Strategy for Agriculture. The essential needs identified included village renewal, the quality of life, short supply chains, social innovation, cooperation and tourism. Cooperation among local actors, innovation (with a particular focus on digital innovation) and investments in infrastructure will be at the centre of Smart Villages Strategy. The key interventions for supporting Smart Villages will be LEADER (art. 71) and investments in basic services in rural areas (art. 68 §4(b)). Smart Villages is considered a cross-cutting issue that can create coherent links between different CAP interventions of the CAP SP such as cooperation and investments (e.g. to support a digital transformation) by defining specific criteria which prioritise Smart Villages actions. Coordination among EU funds will be improved through various governance structures such as the CLLD coordination committee, and working groups for planning the Operation Programmes for ESI Funds.

# Smart Villages and other EU Funds

## Cohesion Policy and Smart Villages

**Eleftherios Stavropoulos (DG REGIO)** stated that it is the time to apply the knowledge developed by the TG in the Smart Villages Toolkit to help Managing Authorities to design SV interventions in the future Operational Programmes. It is important that MAs create in each MS an enabling framework for all EU funds that puts local needs in the driving seat and provides fast and flexible support. Cohesion policy can complement the support offered to Smart Village communities by the CAP in various ways, including support from ERDF to CLLD, financing infrastructure that is not eligible under EAFRD and via cross-border cooperation and Smart Specialisation Strategies.

## Digital Europe Programme & Horizon 2020

**Alexia Rouby (DG AGRI)** stated that the **Digital Europe Programme** will aim to build strategic digital capacity and the deployment of digital technologies supporting e.g. digital innovation hubs, advancing digital skills, building common data spaces and testing & experimentation facilities for AI, including in the agri-food sector. It will be both crucial and challenging, to harvest the potential of those initiatives for the local level. **Horizon 2020 projects** can also provide knowledge, tools, good practices to enhance capacities of communities to innovate on the ground (further information). Horizon Europe is being programmed at the moment with a strong focus on community-led innovation that should support rural digital and ecological transitions.

## Preparatory Action on Smart Villages

**Edina Oscko (E40, project coordinator of the preparatory action on Smart Rural 21)**, explained that their aim is to support villages in their journey to become a Smart Village. Recently, they have received more than 730 applications from all EU Member States to be one of the future 17 test case villages. The project will continue the work on Smart Villages building on the knowledge created by the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages. This presentation provoked a lively discussion and ended with a plea from several participants to ensure that future funding for Smart Villages "supports local action and not just strategies".

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