Smart Villages
How can digital strategies be delivered in order to enable benefit in rural communities?

Dr Katharine Willis, December 2018

#SmartVillages

Approach

- Smart villages are places where rural communities are empowered and are taking the initiative to find solutions to challenges in rural areas and to benefit from innovation and skills.

- This requires both digital and social innovation, and these need to work in partnership.

- Digitisation is not the solution, unless it is adapted to the rural context and made 'useful' to rural communities

- Smart villages need to build on the capacity, scale and resilience of rural communities – this is a very different model to that of the digital initiatives at an urban scale.

National Initiatives

-Broadband investment is being delivered as part of national policy in all case study examples

-There are different levels of coordination at different spatial levels

-National policy focuses on broadband (and sometimes 5G), delivery only not skills

Regional Initiatives

- Partnering of many agencies

- Digital Hubs

- Pilot projects such as Living Labs and Competence Centers

- Digital skills training

- Software platforms

- Digital Champions

- E health innovation

Barriers at national and regional levels

- Overcoming barriers of distance /rural isolation

- Rural depopulation

- Ageing population

- Lack of innovation capacity in rural communities

- Lack of rural services such as transport, healthcare, business support

Barriers at national and regional levels

Key point: Investments in digital infrastructure cannot overcome these barriers unless they are supported by strategic investments in skills and capacity building

Digital Skills Training, St Breward, Cornwall

Benefits at national and regional levels

- Better quality of life – health, access to employment, resilience

- Attracting people to live in rural areas

- Capacity building that enables rural communities to respond to change

Responses to the question 'What do you use the internet for?

Challenges at national and regional levels

- Lack of awareness- Rural communities don't currently see smart villages as a priority compared to other pressing social and economic challenges

- Lack of connectivity- remote rural communities often get connected last (the last mile, 'notspots')

- Lack of quantitative evidence of benefits

- Lack of understanding of needs of rural residents.
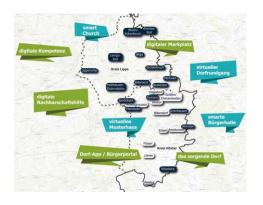
Examples and best practice

Digital Skills training - (FR/UK)

Multi-agency partnering – (UK/FR)

Digital Hubs (UK/FR)

Pilots/
Living labs (FR)

Smart Rural Territory (ES/DE)

Digital Champions (UK/DE)

E-health Innovation (UK)

Digital Village Platform (DE)

Proposals for the development of Smart Villages at National, Regional and Village level

- Investment in digitisation infrastructure needs to be matched with investment in skills training and capacity building at regional and local level

- Enable frameworks for coordination between national, regional and local scale

- Recognise the value of the rural context -smart village initiatives have to be adapted to local situation and with an understanding of what challenges and benefits there are for different types of rural communities. Rural initiatives need to build on rural communities strong sense of participation, community and resilience.

- Funding support for regional and rural villages to develop pilots and examples of best practice of smart villages to enable capacity building (e.g. Lighthouse and Follower model from H2020 Smart Cities and Communities?)

- Support for partnerships between stakeholders at a regional level. This includes the telecoms/infrastructure providers, regional municipalities, regional NGO's and rural community organisations

- Key mechanism is the the support for the development of digital hubs within villages and rural settlements to link regional level initiatives in local communities.

- Digital Champions there is a need to upskill a set of local stakeholders to deliver the initiatives (including not just local people but also service providers)

- Develop range of networked software platforms for the rural regions that enable e-governance, coordination and upskilling that link village and regional level initiatives.

- Develop the innovation capacity of rural villages through initiatives around e-health, smart energy, e-transport,