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SMART VILLAGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GEORGIA

Report



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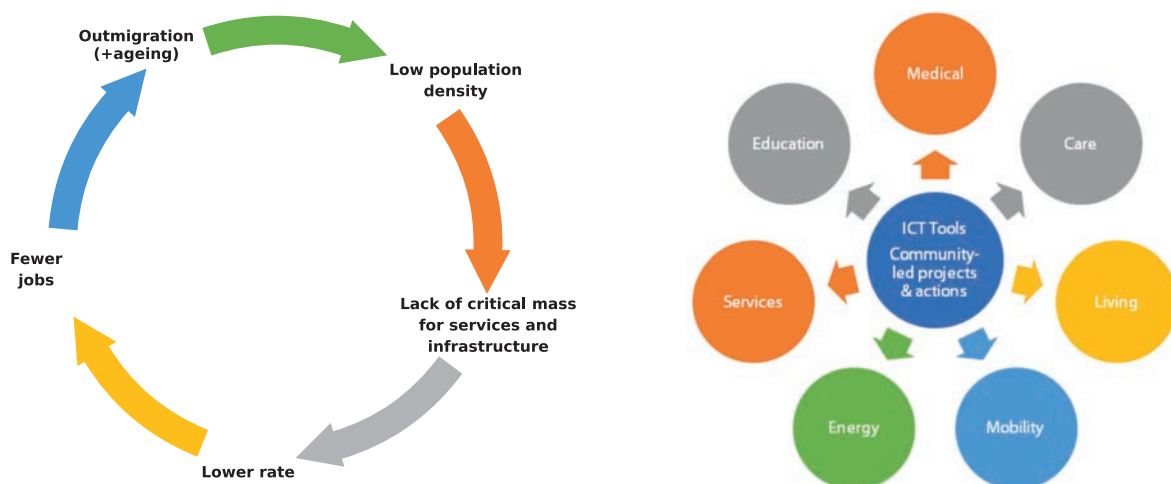
SMART VILLAGE CONCEPT

INTRODUCTION

Life in the village has both its advantages and its downsides. Smart Villages is about rural people who take the initiative to find practical solutions both to the downsides under the exciting new opportunities arising locally. Smart means using every tool available, digital technology is just one of them. It means thinking beyond village itself involving surrounding countryside, groups of villages, small towns and links to cities. Smart means building new partnerships. There is no one model for smart villages, it's about local people taking stock of local assets, drawing on the best available knowledge and taking action. Thousand of rural communities across Europe are doing just this, often supported by EU funds. Many smart villages are responding to downsides like depopulation, but even when population is growing, low density and aging population makes it difficult to sustain the essential rural services.

Rural areas across globe are undergoing rapid change. Transition contains risk but also real opportunity for rural areas to play a new and distinct role. Many rural areas are locked into a "circle of decline" by two mutually reinforcing trends– firstly, a shortage of jobs and sustainable business activity and secondly, inadequate and declining services. In this context, smart villages can be understood as communities that refuse to simply wait for change to happen to them. Smart villages are made up of rural people who take the initiative to explore practical solutions to the underlying challenges they face and to seize new opportunities.

MAIN SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS



Source: OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Strategies to Improve Rural Service Delivery, OECD

Many European, national and regional actors are developing and implementing policy initiatives which contribute to Smart Villages even when they do not use exactly the same name. These initiatives are often driven by growing concern for the major challenges affecting rural areas such as depopulation and access to services. At the same time, there is increasing recognition of the need to enable rural communities to make the most of new opportunities offered by a digital transformation, the transition to a low-carbon and circular economy, new forms of urban-rural linkages, emerging value chains and others. EU supports Smart Villages through instruments, such as “The Common Agricultural Policy – Rural Development”, “EU Cohesion Policy”, “Horizon 2020” and others. Although smart villages are fundamentally about rural people taking the initiative, national regional and local governments can provide an enabling environment for their activity.

DEFINITION OF SMART VILLAGES

Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic, social and/or environmental conditions, in particular by mobilizing solutions offered by digital technologies, innovations and the better use of knowledge for the benefit of inhabitants. Smart Villages benefit from cooperation and alliances with other communities and actors in rural and urban areas. The initiation and the implementation of Smart Village strategies may build on existing initiatives and can be funded by a variety of public and private sources¹.

In Smart Villages traditional and new networks and services are enhanced by means of digital, telecommunication technologies, innovations and the better use of knowledge, for the benefit of inhabitants and businesses. Digital technologies and innovations may support quality of life, higher standard of living, public services for citizens, better use of resources, less impact on the environment, and new opportunities for rural value chains in terms of products and improved processes. The concept of Smart Villages is territorially sensitive, based on the needs and potentials of the respective territory and strategy-led, supported by new or existing territorial strategies. Technology is important as are investments in infrastructure, business development, human capital, capacity and community building. Good governance and citizens involvement is also key. A Smart Village would typically pay attention to e-literacy skills, access to e-health and other basic services, innovative solutions for environmental concerns, circular economy application to agricultural waste, promotion of local products supported by technology and ICT, implementing and taking full benefit of smart specialization agri-food projects, tourism and cultural activities, etc. The concept of Smart Villages covers human settlements in rural areas as well as the surrounding landscapes.

Communities in rural areas can include one or several human settlements, without any restrictions regarding the administrative boundaries or the number of inhabitants. As regards eligibility conditions for support, a country may use definitions of rural areas as provided for by the National Government, OECD, EUROSTAT or other definitions.

A participatory approach means an active participation of the local community in the drawing up and decision-making regarding the Smart Village strategy. During the implementation phase, the participatory approach should ensure that the needs for capacity building and for training of people are properly addressed.

Digital technologies include, for example, information and communication technologies, the exploitation of big data or innovations related to the use of the Internet of Things (IoT). They act as a lever to enable Smart Villages to become more agile, make better use of their resources and improve the at-

¹ Working definition, Briefing note Brussels, 21-22 February 2019

tractiveness of rural areas and the quality of life of rural residents. The use of digital technologies is not a precondition for becoming a Smart Village. Where possible, high-speed broadband should facilitate the deployment of the digital solutions.

Smart Village strategies respond to the challenges and needs of their territory by building on their local strengths and assets. Strategies must determine short, medium and long-term goals. Progress must be measurable through performance indicators that will be set in a roadmap. These roadmaps should be reviewed at regular intervals to allow continuous improvement. Strategies may aim, for example: to improve access to services (in various fields such as health, training or transport), to enhance business opportunities and create jobs, to the development of short food supply chains and farming practices, to the development of renewable energies, to development of a circular economy, to a better exploitation of natural resources, to adapt to climate change, to preserve the environment and biodiversity, to a better valorization of the cultural heritage for a greater tourist attractiveness etc.

Innovative services in Smart Villages

Over time, many rural areas have experienced a decline in the range of services available. Changing demographic structures, public sector cutbacks and the impact of climate change can stimulate local communities to step in and fill the gap. Discovering and implementing new solutions to address local challenges is therefore one of the key characteristics of Smart Villages. The definition states that Smart Villages “use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities.” This includes innovative services that can act as a catalyst for improving the quality of life in a village.

Smart Villages innovate in various areas and in very diverse ways, depending on the opportunities and challenges stemming from their local contexts. One of the common features of Smart Village innovative services is that their design and implementation involves several people or organizations. These include locals (internal stakeholders) and supporting actors from outside (external stakeholders). In addition, the private sector can play an important role. Private companies often demonstrate flexibility and innovation, which can bring added value in the provision of services to the local community. Whether or not external stakeholders are involved, innovation cannot happen without sufficient capacity and a strong organizational process to see it through.

Combining services can go a long way to maximize the efficiency of service delivery. Small communities in rural areas face difficulties in finding specialized workers and mobilizing financial resources. Therefore, creative solutions are necessary to ensure that such communities can benefit from a relatively wide range of services.

Role and importance of digital technologies

Digital tools and connectivity are closely associated with the “smart” concept and innovation. Unsurprisingly, digital technologies are widely used within Smart Villages development, and “act as a lever that enables Smart Villages to become more agile, make better use of their resources and improve the attractiveness of rural areas and the quality of life of rural residents.” What makes a village smart is not limited to increased levels of digitization or connectivity. Instead, “smartness” stems from the use of digital technologies as vehicles for local development goals and the improvement of the quality of life of citizens.

Many villages make use of the opportunities offered by digital technologies, whereas others are much less advanced. For instance, tackling depopulation can be pursued through exploiting digital technologies to create work opportunities without the need for working-age adults to leave the community (e-work). Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that connectivity remains a crucial enabling factor for the utilization of digital solutions. The use of digital technologies is not what defines a Smart Village, nor are they the only way to achieve development objectives. Nevertheless, digital technologies can in many cases be part of the solution to reach objectives of a Smart Village in a more efficient and effective way.

As with other aspects of Smart Villages, citizens’ involvement in rolling out digital solutions is an essential component of success. Citizens need to be able to use digital technologies to their full potential and be able to recognize their added value for improving their quality of life. This is particularly true for rural communities with an ageing population. Moreover, local communities (including at the local government level) need to be aware of the opportunities these technologies provide.

Development of a Smart Village strategy

A Smart Village strategy aims to channel the resources of its community to deal with key problems faced within their local context. Typically, the strategy offers new solutions to local challenges by “building on their local strengths and assets.” Strategies can be initiated as a reaction to a particularly challenging situation, such as demographic decline. They can also arise from the intention to seize an opportunity to improve local conditions and quality of life.

The diversity of local contexts, starting points and triggers indicates that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for becoming a Smart Village. However, there are common elements that characterize most of the initiatives, with three enabling conditions identified as essential for the development and implementation of Smart Village strategies:

1. *Establishing good governance structures and adequate capacity as the first step* - The process can be initiated through existing structures but can also

be steered by a group of active citizens. It should be open and inclusive, engaging with a wide range of relevant stakeholders to ensure that all voices are being heard when making strategic decisions². Local authorities can play a crucial role in this process, as they are in a strategic position to liaise between and coordinate different interest groups. Ensuring sufficient capacity to follow through on the plans is essential. The participation of people with first-hand experience and know-how is especially vital.

2. *An active and engaged local community is crucial for success* - The active engagement of locals – not only in initiating the planning processes but also in delivering on planned actions – is a familiar feature of successful Smart Villages. Involving citizens from an early stage helps establish a common understanding of needs and opportunities, thereby ensuring the development of a strategic plan founded on a shared vision for the future. In addition, participation creates a sense of ownership, which can prove to be a key driver during the implementation stage.
3. *Strategies should aim for simplicity* - Strategies should be rooted in a shared understanding of needs and should be conceived as a sequence of actions aimed towards a clear goal. It is important that the strategies do not duplicate efforts that have already been formulated as part of another strategy – whether national, regional or local. They should instead focus on smaller-scale development goals that respond to the most direct needs of the community that created them.

Financing Smart Villages

Securing funding for the implementation of projects is an important component of a successful Smart Village strategy. There are a wide variety of financing models, building on, as the definition says, “a variety of public and private sources.” However, some solutions require no, or only minimal, funding. Overall, the most prevalent financing approach is the leverage of funding opportunities from different institutional levels, including EU, national and regional sources when possible.

Future public funding schemes should consider the following:

1. *Support should be adapted to the scale and level of development* - Even when targeting larger areas, Smart Village strategies initially require relatively small-scale investments. Nonetheless, these can also be part of larger cooperative efforts which require a different financing model. Hence, being able to unlock financing adapted to the specific project scale for subsequent implementation stages would make it easier to manage the financial aspects of these processes. In addition, specific stages of development require tailored funding opportunities. Building up administrative capacity to plan and implement strategies calls for a different type of support than actual execution of projects.

2. *The administrative setup should be simplified and streamlined* - Funding schemes should consider administrative burden and should aim to reduce administrative complexity to a minimum. A potential solution would be the creation of a streamlined “one-stop-shop” solution.
3. *A network of Smart Village advisors could help relatively disadvantaged areas* - Embarking on a Smart Village trajectory requires specialized knowledge and expertise. Being able to use experts active in local development and financing can help to unlock opportunities for those areas most in need of support. It can also speed up the exchange of experiences by providing a forum for sharing of best practices and enhancing cooperation between communities.

FIVE DRIVERS OF SMART VILLAGES

1. **Responding to depopulation and demographic change** - Even though depopulation is considered a symptom of rural decline rather than a cause, it is one of the main factors driving the smart villages agenda. Rural population (% of total population) in Georgia was reported at 40.96 % in 2019, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators and according to the UN World Urbanization Prospects, it will decline to 27% of total population of Georgia by 2050.
2. **Finding local solutions to cutbacks and the centralization of public services** - Even when the population of rural areas is stable or growing, lower population densities, together with complicated logistics drive up the unit costs of providing certain basic services like education, healthcare, commerce and public transport.
3. **Exploiting linkages with small towns and cities** - Rural areas have a symbiotic relationship with cities and towns. Historically, the relationship has sometimes been seen in purely competitive terms – as a zero-sum game. What the cities gained; rural areas were thought to lose. However, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others have analyzed the complex web of linkages between cities and rural areas and shown that, if carefully managed, there is much potential for win-win arrangements between the two. For smart villages, it is not just a case of overcoming the urban-rural divide, but of harnessing the unique potential of each for mutual benefit.
4. **Maximizing the role of rural areas in the transition to a low-carbon, circular economy** - Rural areas are front-and-center in the shift to a low-carbon economy, according to the OECD³. These natural assets often form the cornerstone of their competitive advantage as well as their identity and attractiveness as places to live. They are, therefore, both particularly exposed to the risks of climate change and environmental degradation, and in a privileged position to make a difference.

3 OECD Regional Outlook 2016: Productive regions for inclusive societies, 2016

5. **Promoting the digital transformation of rural areas** - Digital technologies have the capacity to radically transform the disadvantages that rural areas face in terms of distance and low population density by permitting instantaneous virtual communication and access to e-services. Rural areas are often characterized as suffering from a triple digital divide: broadband connectivity, skills and uptake.

SMART VILLAGE STRATEGIES

Smart Villages are about channeling the energy, vision and commitment of local people towards local action. Smart Villages primarily begin with local people coming together around a common problem or a common vision to implement some form of 'plan of actions' in order to achieve a specific goal. Smart Villages strategies should not be perceived, interpreted or promoted as yet another layer of formal, comprehensive territorial strategic documents. They are not about repeating yet another broad participatory planning process of the kind that is already often covered within local and municipal development strategies. So rather than taking a comprehensive approach, they tend to start small and focus on key opportunities or problems that motivate local people.

Smart Village strategies are vehicles for nurturing and responding to local initiatives. They can be supported by strengthening existing local instruments and linking them to better-targeted rural development measures. The important point is that a Smart Village strategy should simply be a vehicle for guiding and effectively supporting local initiatives and is not the end in itself. On the other hand, Smart Villages strategies go beyond isolated activities of individual local actors and aim instead to enable the community to jointly implement integrated packages of future-orientated actions which respond to their long-term challenges and opportunities. This requires going beyond isolated grants and measures for local development to create a toolkit of support which enables local people to test out and implement new solutions to the problems they face.

The success of such bottom-up initiatives involves building platforms and partnerships among relevant stakeholders and, particularly, the active involvement and support of the appropriate local and regional authorities. While the initial idea for Smart Villages strategies may start at the level of a small village or hamlet, their success often depends upon cooperation with other nearby villages, towns and cities.

SCOPE AND SCALE OF SMART VILLAGES STRATEGIES

The scope of Smart Villages strategies can be very broad. Smart Villages initiatives are commonly observed to focus on one or more of the broader aspects and conditions for rural development where cooperative rather than individual action is required to achieve real change. Depending on local circumstances and motivation, these initiatives may prioritize economic, social or environ-

mental issues - or a combination of them. There is no need to deal with everything at once. On the other hand, issues that have persisted for many years, such as quality of rural services (e.g. health, education and mobility) and the management of natural resources (e.g. local water quality), continue to encourage local people to mobilize and take action to improve their quality of life. New solutions and approaches can bring fresh ideas to addressing these 'traditional' rural issues.

In both cases, '**social innovation**' commonly sits at the core of the Smart Villages concept. Social innovation has numerous definitions, but in the context of Smart Villages, it can be thought of as "the re-configuring of social practices in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors". Or more simply, putting local people and their needs first, with creative solutions to complex societal challenges.

In many countries, **digital innovation** is also at the heart of strategies on Smart Villages and/or 'intelligent' territories, as they are often called. These approaches see the main goals of Smart Villages strategies as seizing opportunities of a rural digital transformation and overcoming the critical gaps in infrastructure, digital skills and the application of digital innovations to rural services. However, there are also many examples of social innovation in rural areas which are not digital and even when the Smart Village Strategy does revolve around digital innovation, people are always firmly at the center.

Regarding **scale**, Smart Villages strategies can be formulated at the level of village settlements, municipalities, groups of municipalities or other small-scale discrete territorial units – whatever is most appropriate and relevant to the local understanding of the term 'village'. However, as a general rule, the spatial scale of a Smart Village Strategy will start small and grow through cooperation with other areas.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SMART VILLAGE STRATEGY

Some simple criteria need to be developed at the national, regional and even provincial level to help identify an appropriate Smart Village Strategy. The key components could include:

- Evidence of an **active group of local citizens** who are driving the overall Smart Villages process.
- Clear expression of a **community 'vision' for change** related to one or more of the key problems/opportunities identified by the community, together with evidence of a good level of community engagement with this vision.
- Evidence that the Smart Village Strategy is designed to find **new or alternative solutions** to the underlying challenges and opportunities in the specific context of the local people. This could involve the application of digital technologies, new forms of renewable energy, social innovations in provision of rural services, enhancing urban-rural linkages, support for

emerging value chains like the bioeconomy, or other issues that are relevant in the local context.

- A simple, tailor-made **road-map** with: i) a clear explanation of the sequence of cooperation actions /interventions that have been proposed by the community for pursuing their vision; ii) an overview of how and by whom) these actions /interventions will be managed; iii) an explanation of how members of the wider community have and will be effectively engaged in this process; iv) an estimation of related costs; and v) an explanation of how results will be measured and monitored.
- Eligible actions / interventions for funding in the roadmap might include: a) **'soft' investments** such as animation, advice, training, research, feasibility and technical studies; and b) **small-scale, tangible investments**. The engagement of external actors / experts from outside of the community (e.g. specialist advisors, academics or community facilitators) could be considered an eligible expense in view of ensuring that the community has the necessary capacity to implement the proposed actions.
- Where appropriate, a **business model for the long-term financial sustainability** of the Smart Village Strategy should be taken into account from the start.
- Any **linkages** between the Smart Village Strategy and other existing broader strategies (e.g. local, regional or national strategies, etc.) should also be highlighted.

In reality, Smart Villages strategies can – and will – vary greatly. There is no single model or 'one-size-fits-all' solution. One of the most important reasons for these differences is the starting point. Some communities are inevitably more advanced than others and it is important to ensure that criteria are adapted to local realities and needs. Any community-led strategy should be seen as a process rather than an end-state. Every village or rural community can be a Smart Village, but how it achieves this will depend upon local context, including factors such as the levels of local knowledge, human capital, local drivers, the strength of the social ties that hold the community together, and the favorable attitude – or otherwise – of local institutions.

In many cases, it will be necessary to build capacity at the local level to ensure that the communities which are most in need do not lose out. Smart Villages must be an inclusive – not an exclusive – concept. Digital technologies can be an important part of building this capacity, but they should remain enabling tools and be used when they are appropriate to the specific challenges / opportunities being addressed by the local community.

OVERALL APPROACH TO ONE OF THE POTENTIAL PRIORITIES - RURAL DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital, economic and social transformation throughout globe is increasing the pressure on villages and their citizens, businesses and public bodies to innovate and to adapt continuously. They cannot just sit back and wait for digital

solutions to come to them. They need to become 'Smart' players in their own digital transformation. Stakeholders need to ensure that several conditions are in place throughout their territory to support villages in their digital transformation. These conditions need to be assessed when developing interventions for supporting Smart Villages:

1. **Access to connectivity to fast internet need to be ensured.** However, to realize their potential, Smart Villages need to combine access to 'hard' infrastructure with the development of other essential 'soft' capacities and skills.
2. **Mechanisms for involving local stakeholders in the identification of digital needs and in the cocreation of digital solutions need to be in place.** The adoption and spread of digital technologies will only take place if local stakeholders recognize their usefulness and have the skills and competences to apply them. This starts by carrying out a needs and competence analysis with residents, public players and businesses, and jointly developing a digitalization roadmap. The roadmap will generally start with digital literacy and inclusion, intended to equip stakeholders with the appropriate digital information, followed by skills and competences to access existing or planned digital infrastructure, understand and use the resulting services and finally contribute to the co-design of new services and actions.
3. **Villages must have access to intermediaries, brokers and 'spaces' to support a digital transition.** Digital hubs, fab-labs, co-working spaces, living labs and other intermediate bodies can help to develop local capacity to innovate. With their support, villages can create and contribute to new smart products and services designed to benefit rural communities and their stakeholders.
4. **Cooperation with other digital players in wider regional and national ecosystems need to be supported.** Digital innovations are largely driven by major corporations, research institutions and large metropolitan areas and usually require scale. Rural communities find themselves working within a complex public innovation ecosystem of different territorial and sectoral strategies and players. Each Smart Village must be realistic and position itself within these digitalization systems according to its level of digital maturity and build alliances and cooperate with local and national political, social and economic structures. A first step is to map out policy competences and players. This will help the locals understand where responsibility lies for each thematic or policy area and the mechanisms that allow them to influence policy and practice.

When designing their support framework for Smart Villages, stakeholders need to consider, among other things, the selection criteria and procedures they will use for selecting Smart Villages Strategies. In the case of Smart Village Strategies targeted at digitalization, the support framework should not only take into account the digital needs and opportunities of the villages, but also their digital maturity or capacity to successfully implement their proposed strategy.

This can be assessed in two ways: (1) Firstly, the usual method is to assess **the level and quality of their digital resources**; (2) **Digital functions** that rural settlements are able to carry out both locally and within wider digital ecosystems, namely:

- **Facilitating the social and economic digital inclusion of local stakeholders** - Village stakeholders need locally accessible and tailored support to ensure everyone has the same opportunities and no one is left behind. This function can range from delivering entry level to 'state of the art' digital training/competence acquisition, literacy skills and digital 'helplines' to help take advantage of the latest/most widespread technologies and new or planned public and business services.
- **Supporting digital and social innovation and co-creation in coordination with external policymakers/service deliverers** - In order to keep up with change, villages need to mobilize their key resource: people. This function involves creating local intermediaries that empower local people to co-design solutions with the support of external policymakers and service deliverers.
- **Providing mediation/brokerage services to enable villages to access external Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI)** - A third function is that of mediation or brokerage to enable villages to identify and act upon technology, social and market trends and create mutually beneficial partnerships with RTDI stakeholders such as universities, tech companies and government research agencies. Or any others.

Smart Villages addressing rural digitalization embark on a journey which not only requires 'catching up' with more urbanized areas in terms of digital resources but also designing digital solutions from a rural perspective and carving out of digital functions that the village can carry out to become a realistic player within a wider digital ecosystem. Key stages in the digital transformation of rural areas, could be:

1. EXCLUDED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor or no mobile and broadband • Low/no skills • Low/no public-private services • Low/no inclusion
2. CONNECTED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Broadband • Elementary capacity building • Entry level digital literacy/inclusion • Engage target stakeholders and co-identify priority actions
3. ENGAGED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread digital literacy & service use • Local access to training, education, public & business services • Stakeholder input to services design, roll out & monitoring
4. EXPERIENCED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fibre broadband • Business/citizen capacity to exploit digital innovation • Cooperators in territorial digital transformation • Full equivalency of service access with metropolitan areas
5. PLAYER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full technical, economic and social capacity to innovation & contribute to digital + sustainable economy and society • Village (co)owner of its data & shares in added value created • Partner in the development of new products and services

The table above illustrates that in the early stages there is a stronger need to support hard physical investments to bring internet and digital infrastructure to rural areas, together with soft interventions for capacity building in digital skills to take advantage of the investments made. As villages move towards more advanced stages, the interventions focus increasingly on the combination of soft and hard actions to enable villages and their actors to become digital players within wider regional and national ecosystems.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OF SMART VILLAGES, PLEASE VISIT "SMART VILLAGES PORTAL" @ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal_en

SMART VILLAGES IN ACTION – INSPIRING EXAMPLES FROM EU

MULTISERVICE HUBS

1. Village shop: a meeting point of private and public services (FI)

Description of the initiative: In Finland the village shop is a rural shop, with a sales floor smaller than 400 square metres. The vital village shop helps to retain important services in sparsely populated areas. It adds vitality and attraction to a community. The village shop can function as a channel to a wide service network. The main objective of the project was to reform the operations model of the village shop so that local inhabitants and other customers (e.g. summer dwellers) can benefit from versatile 'service packages' of private and public services. A total of 12 village shops from separate villages and municipalities were targeted. Together, they represented four different Finnish supermarket chains. In many villages, shops already offered supplementary services like postal services, cafes, lottery tickets, petrol stations and car repairs, or pharmacies and medical practices. However, none had branched out into offering public services (except for one recycling point). The project implemented innovations through cooperation between private and public institutions.

The shops in the project started providing services such as the delivery of purchases, catering services and customer delivery of municipal food. They provided internet access points to municipal and public e-services, electronic information boards on municipal and commercial news, pharmacy and medical practices, collection points for e-pharmacies, postal and parcel services, and amusement machines. To guide these developments, it was first asked to shopkeepers, village associations and the municipality what the village shop means, what private and/or public services are desired, and what benefits can be harnessed by concentrating services under the same roof, or by breaking administrative silos. Depending on results, negotiations continued with the relevant service providers. Some services introduced by the project remained in operation even after the project ended. The most popular included electric information boards at 5 village shops, postal services, travel and parcel services, internet access points, and medicine cabinets.

Main results: The project shed light on how to assess local needs for services and translate these needs into economically feasible solutions. The experience can be broken down into eight steps: 1. Identifying locals who are willing to develop their own local services 2. Choosing pilot municipalities which have the ability and will to see the project through 3. Estimating needs for services by the municipality and locals 4. Presenting services offered by local suppliers 5. Concluding the agreement with the municipality 6. Accepting applications for project funding from local suppliers who do not reach market-based agreements to carry out their services with the municipality 7. Reaching an agreement between municipalities and local suppliers 8. Implementing the project

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2. Multifunctional marketplaces (EE)

Description of the initiative: The aim of the project is to renovate a building in Tõrva's market complex. It is planned to have a farm shop and a cafe-kitchen. The renovated building will take into account the local milieu and history to better express its regional identity. The cafe-kitchen offers catering services and uses local food products to make its meals. In addition, offers food, and holds workshops and thematic events 1-2 times per month. After the building's renovation, facilities will include an integrated market complex with an indoor and outdoor market open all year round.

Mulgi market tries to be flexible and cooperative with local community activities and to offer added value during bigger community events - for example organizing an evening terrace cafe, follow-up events after bigger community events, or offering breakfast. The project helps to involve young people that are interested in entrepreneurship, encourages amateur activities in the kitchen, and allows cooperation with social care servants on carrying out learning activities about cooking and food. It is also involving student companies to make market related activities more popular among young people.

Main results: The result of establishing a farm market is having a point of sale for selling products made by local small producers, farmers and handicraft makers. In addition, it acts as an intermediate between producers and locals for selling and buying local food using a short supply chain. The aim of the project is to continuously develop community services and to create well-working cooperation ties between different organizations. It also allows people to use well-equipped rooms for different activities.

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3. Promoting Coworking (Cowocat rural) (ES)

Description of the initiative: Coworking is a new way of working that allows independent professionals, entrepreneurs and SMEs from different sectors to share the same physical and virtual workspace. In the city of Barcelona, co-working spaces are increasingly popular and the network COWOCAT was put in place to connect them. The project promoters thought that rural co-working spaces could stimulate economic activity and help maintain the population in rural areas in Spain where abandonment is a real threat. Therefore, the project aims to generate employment in rural areas by offering new opportunities to professionals and entrepreneurs that can be attracted by the better quality of life and reduced living costs in rural areas.

This new way of working offers an opportunity for professionals to work in a collaborative space without moving away from a rural environment. It could also attract more people to live in rural areas. The most interesting finding of the project was that it is more important to have motivated professionals than

an available space. As coworkers often rely on ICT in their work, the availability of internet and broadband access in rural areas is also vital to spreading the coworking philosophy.

Main results: 14 coworking spaces have been created from 2014 to 2016 - More than 130 professionals are linked to these coworking spaces - Small success stories included examples of families staying in a rural area for a holiday while a parent had to connect to their work via a co-working space.

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4. A village hub project in the Westhoek (BE)

Description of the initiative: A village hub project in the Westhoek region of Flanders, Belgium, is a community-led initiative that created a thriving social center that delivers a range of services in a remote area. Not only does it address mobility challenges, but it serves as a focal point for the village, bringing together people of all ages. The project grew out of an earlier initiative that identified difficulties experienced by many people in rural areas in travelling around for their basic needs, especially if they do not have a car. The project 'Village Hub Beveren aan de Ijzer' built upon the positive engagement experience with local people and involved them from the very outset of the project design and development. The main idea was to establish a service center providing social contact and a venue for activities in the village of Beveren aan de Ijzer. This hub is located in a former restaurant building and now contains a small convenience store and catering service. EU funding covered building-related costs as the project began.

The hub was developed in cooperation with the disability organization De Lovie which saw an opportunity to expand its work among those with intellectual difficulties. In fact, many of the people with whom De Lovie works are finding meaningful employment at the hub. More than 20 people also volunteer at the hub. A popular tradition in Flanders is to eat bread rolls ('pistolets') and coffee cakes on Sunday afternoons. The village hub is now compensating for the closure of the local bakery by serving as a pick-up place for such baked treats, a sweet example of how to boost social cohesion. The villagers had a clear set of objectives in mind when launching the hub. They wanted to address poor public transportation by bringing facilities closer to the people. They also wanted to reinforce neighborhood cohesion and reciprocity, promote short supply chains for local food and develop an economically sustainable village hub.

Main results: A year after its creation, the project is still going from strength to strength. More than 20 suppliers are selling their goods at the store which serves a fifth of the village's population of 500. Some of the useful services provided include glass collection and a parcel service. The hub has become an indispensable part of life in the village, a place where locals go to pick up

their neighbor's shopping or to simply meet people in a friendly environment. Building on this positive experience, the Association of Flemish municipalities (Westhoek Overleg) aims to promote a network of similar hubs in Flemish villages.

Contact: dieter.hoet@vvsb.be, Total cost: €20,000

DIGITAL AND ICT

5. Digitalizing a museum collection (EE)

Description of the initiative: The aim of the project is to digitalize a museum collection (exhibits and archives) through a professional photographer. Thereby the digitalized and multilingual exhibits will be available on internet for a wider audience. The project is planned as a two-year project and the database created can be updated daily with new data if needed. Mahtra farm museum started its activities in 1984 when a thematic exhibition about Mahtra war was opened in the local school. The Mahtra war was a peasant insurgency that took place in the state of Mahtra. Estonian authors have covered this topic in their writings, awarding it an important place in Estonian cultural history. The farm museum was officially opened in 1970. In addition to its exhibit on the Mahtra war, the museum offers a comprehensive overview of the life of 19th Estonian peasants.

Main results: Thanks to the digitization process, everybody can now see, read and learn more about museum exhibits. This offers added value to the whole region.

Contact: Meeri Maastik, meeri@maainfo.ee

6. Connecting a remote Portuguese village (PT)

Description of the initiative: The Portuguese mountain village of Sabugueiro, located in the Serra da Estrela nature park, has undergone a digital transformation. It is now a showcase for a range of digital innovations which enhance services, improve the environment and increase community engagement. The first challenge was connecting the village – the highest in the country. The nearest fibreoptic cables were 7km away. The Vodafone Foundation, a not-for-profit entity set up by Vodafone in Portugal, decided to test out the feasibility of digitising the village. They worked with the municipality to engage the residents, provided the funding, installed the cables, including the extra 5km of cables needed to connect homes, local shops and other buildings within the village. A total of around 400 access points were made available, with 9 disadvantaged families receiving computers and a digital service pack that includes TV, internet and phone connection. Though the villagers expressed

some initial reservations, attitudes changed quickly thanks to the new sense of engagement the connectivity made possible. Many locals, particularly the elderly, had no prior experience of using the internet, but they are now enjoying a new-found connection with the 'outside world'.

Faster internet connection also enabled new services to be delivered such as remote health checks. A monitoring system, 'Intellicare', which digitally checks blood pressure and blood sugar levels, is being used by 39 residents at the village's retirement home and by 18 households. The safety of locals has also been improved through the installation of 24 energy-efficient LED lights in the village. A second major focus of the 'Smart Mountain Village' project is on saving energy. Monitoring devices provide information about the amount of energy being consumed in real time. The energy consumption habits of 40 households, as well as the retirement home are improving as a result. Moreover, an eco-taxi service consisting of two electric vehicles has been launched to further lower the area's carbon emissions and to provide increased mobility for people with social vulnerabilities and healthcare needs.

Main results: Though the project is not part of a wider initiative, it has inspired other endeavors such as the creation of an energy savings shop by the City Council of Seia, which targets inhabitants of the entire municipality. This provides advice on how to reduce household energy bills.

Contact: gai@cm-seia.pt

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

7. Energy, Forest and Climate change (ENFOCC) (ES)

Description of the initiative: An inter-territorial cooperation project in Catalonia (11 Local Actions Groups) promoted the use of endogenous renewable energy and management plans contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The project was developed along three-axis covering energy management, forest management and biomass and climate change. Activities included the promotion of the benefits of using energy plans in public buildings and the review of service-provision contracts, the development of a software tool (ENEGEST) that notably allows small enterprises to monitor and optimize energy use, the organization of courses on biomass boilers and the conduction of studies and pilot projects on herd grazing as a forest management tool, and the calculation of the carbon footprint of agri-food products.

In 2018, the project developed an innovative model that calculates the costs of an energy transition at local/regional level by using a simple survey. The model provides data about the investment needed, the economic savings and economic costs at present as well as future and accumulated costs, and the energy needs for a municipality or a region to become energy self-sufficient. Also, the project started to study the spread of electric vehicles in rural municipalities

by studying options for installing charging points in rural areas. The use of ICT tools provided by the project (ENEGEST and Local Energy Transitions) contributed to improving energy efficiency

Main results: In the 47 towns that have worked on energy management plans, a total of 250 000 EUR of savings has been reported. This budget will be reinvested in measures that will allow each town save even more energy. Also 100 SMEs have used the tool ENEGEST to reduce their energy expenses, and more than 5 774 tons of CO₂ have been saved by installing biomass boilers.

A new economy is emerging in the territories participating in the project. Not all town halls had access to advice to reduce municipal electricity consumption. This stimulated the creation of new businesses that now supply the service to the benefit of all inhabitants. All the municipalities of Catalonia (947) have been studied under the model Local Energy Transition and 2 municipalities have been studied for the implementation of electric vehicles.

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MOBILITY

8. Flexible working culture - rethinking of work, place, time and life (FI)

Description of the initiative: Rethinking of work, space and time is a workspace solution that aims to reduce the need to commute. The initiative promotes more efficient time management, allows for better concentration on work, and facilitates working and living arrangements. It brings the workplace to people, closer to home, for periodic or for permanent use. In general, flexible workspace solutions can be located in an office complex, commercial building, underutilized property, or in a residential area with good transport connections. A well-equipped, intelligent working environment can be combined with other facilities to boost well-being at work and to support recreational activities. The FLEX workspace combined working and well-being and helped revitalize rural regions. In the country village model, the office space is packaged with accommodation and well-being at work and recreational activities offered by local service providers.

The flexible working week should be spent on everyone's own terms. Silence and peacefulness also outside of work can be important to many people. Workers often requested contact with locals and local entrepreneurs. Of the services offered, boat trips around the archipelago proved particularly popular. Most workers were looking for an ambiance that was different to what they were used to at home. For many, the archipelago offered a new experience. Flexible working aims to cut down on interruptions in the regular working day. In the Flex experiment, work was carried out from archipelago offices for one week. When there were fewer interruptions, workers managed to concentrate better on tasks that required creativity and innovation. Work tasks involved creating

new products and ideas. Workers benefited from gains in well-being at work and higher productivity.

Main results: The purpose of the project was to tempt more recreational residents, workers, employees, employers, entrepreneurs and companies to visit Finish islands during their off-season to telework from there and, in so doing, to boost their innovation and invite them to interact with the local community. Another purpose was to find out how flexible work arrangements increase the use of local services, how they encourage the development of new service concepts, how they encourage workers to move to rural municipalities permanently, to promote corporate growth, and to counteract imbalances in employment.

The project found suitable locations near villages to conduct its “Flexperiments”. In these areas, accommodation and working places as well as access to food and other services was also available outside the holiday season. Twelve of these locations were used. “Flexperimenters”: (1) 54 interested companies/organizations, mostly micro-size enterprises and SMEs; (2) Lines of business: bakery, media, social and health, wellbeing, medical, graphic design, land use planning, fitness, coaching, translating, publishing, lighting, advertising, research, architecture; etc.

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9. A mobile animal clinic (EE)

Description of the initiative: There was a need to find new solutions because the previous rental agreement of pet veterinary clinic had ended. A client-survey was conducted, which showed the need to be closer to clients and to offer the service in different villages. The mobile clinic makes it possible to visit clients at any time in any location. The new service is unique and brings a new veterinary ambulance service to the area. Clients of the new service include both veterinary clinics in the Järva county, and owners of farm animals. There are 1 200 pets registered in the area. Before this project, no similar service was on offer in Estonia. Now veterinary services are available in rural areas and located close to potential clients.

The project’s output is a ready-to-use mobile veterinary service offered in northern parts of Järva county. The mobile pet clinic was purchased at the entrepreneur’s own costs. It is a closed van with clinical equipment (closets, shelves, chairs, table, pneumatic table) necessary to provide veterinary services. The project helped purchase these accessories.

Main results: The main result is the improved quality of products and services offered on location. These new treatment opportunities could create jobs for other veterinarians. In addition, the project offers the possibility for veterinary students to undergo practical training in the mobile clinic.

Contact: Meeri Maastik, meeri@maainfo.ee

10. The mobile cinema (EE)

Description of the initiative: The project helped to purchase modern mobile cinema equipment, notably a cinema projector, a mobile screen, speakers, pop-up tents for cinema visitors, and chairs. Thanks to the purchased equipment it is now possible to show movies in new places. The furniture and tents can also be used for other events. The project purchased a simple professional photo camera to make documentaries and a video chronicle. The equipment is making it possible to offer film-making services and to organize film-making workshops, where young people plan and create movies. The aim of the project is to bring together people around this mobile cinema and to organize leisure time activities.

Main results: The project helps to involve and stimulate young people's own initiatives in filmmaking, and to film a local video chronicle and documentaries. The project also helped to present this service in other areas. It reduced the need for local people to drive to bigger towns to go to the cinema.

Contact: Meeri Maastik, meeri@maainfo.ee

11. Organized hitch-hiking to improve rural mobility (FR)

Description of the initiative: In many remote rural areas public transport is infrequent or non-existent and the car can be the only option for getting around. The Rezo Pouce project has re-purposed an old tradition to boost local mobility and to enhance social cohesion. It enables carpooling at designated hitch-hiking spots. Registered users can get a ride to and from their chosen destinations. It provides a pragmatic solution for the often problematic first or last leg of a journey, for example getting to or from a train station. To register for this free service, users, who must be over 16 years old, simply provide their municipality with a copy of their ID card and sign the Rezo Pouce charter. Drivers, who also have to register, are then given windscreen stickers to show that they are part of the scheme, while passengers are given a special badge. Administration costs are covered by the participating towns and are not passed on to users.

The mobility scheme is funded under energy saving and soft mobility objectives. The subscription fee for the municipality is based on the number of registered users of the scheme. For municipalities with a population of 10000 to 25000, the fee amounts to €7500 and €3000 for two years. In return, the social enterprise behind Rezo Pouce supports the roll-out and provides technical and coordination assistance, along with the training of the dedicated person at the municipality charged with overseeing the scheme.

Main results: In rural and semi-rural areas of France, such as those in the regions of Île-de-France, Bretagne and Aquitaine, where the scheme is operating, the uptake has been substantial. The number of shared journeys is increasing threefold each year and more than 1500 municipalities are now taking part.

The social enterprise behind Rezo Pouce organises training sessions, gathering representatives from local authorities to brief them on all aspects of the scheme. The aim is to expand still further. To this end, the project has teamed up with the Transdev Group, a major player in the global transport industry, and the Macif Foundation, an organization supporting social innovation, to develop an app that facilitates the registration of new users to the service and the matching of those seeking and offering rides. The app records patterns of use and thus allows the pick-up spots to be adjusted according to demand. Around three quarters of the trips on Rezo Pouce have been shown to be less than 10km long, emphasising the local character of the project. Young adults without a driving license are the main user group.

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12. Delivering services in sparsely populated areas (ES)

Description of the initiative: The Spanish province of Soria has experienced severe depopulation over the past century. The 'La Exclusiva' initiative is looking to arrest this long-term decline by improving the quality of life of those remaining in the area, particularly the elderly who make up a large percentage of the inhabitants.

The economic downturn in Spain has put rural service provision under strain. The effects are particularly felt by the elderly who make up a significant part of the population in rural areas and who are, in general, less mobile. In Soria the problem is particularly acute: there are more people aged 80-90 than children under 10 years old. Two out of three villages in the province have fewer than 100 inhabitants and numbers are declining. For retailers, this is an extremely challenging environment. However, La Exclusiva is a private company with a difference. It focuses on 'social logistics' as a way to help residents remain in sparsely populated areas and to create new employment opportunities.

The entrepreneurs behind La Exclusiva individually ran five shops selling a range of products in several villages in the province. Year-on-year depopulation was adversely affecting their revenues. Rather than accepting what seemed like an inevitable decline of their businesses, they joined forces to create a social enterprise. The aim of the new initiative was to allow the continued provision of retail services in remote rural areas. The fledgling enterprise used the local 'El Hueco' co-working space to keep costs down. Initially, the ambition was to provide access for those in remoter areas to basic products, such as food and medicine. By pooling resources, the privately funded initiative ensures that customers do not have to pay extra for home delivery. The service provided is a time-saver and a comfort due to its home delivery model. The weekly face-to-face contact is also an important socialization opportunity for some elderly customers in particular.

Prior to launch, La Exclusiva carried out a survey to determine whether there would be enough customers to make the business viable. Concluding that there was enough aggregate demand, it opened up four new supply routes in the Soria province, which provide a total of 518 villages and some 10000 families with access to the weekly deliveries. The social and entrepreneurial venture has been a real success. has been able to extend greatly the range of services it offers. For example, it now offers electronic and media services, drugstore, library, laundry and dry-cleaning services, plumbing, gardening, electricity bill checking, catering, and the sale of organic products and furniture.

Main results: La Exclusiva has created two new full-time jobs and three part-time positions. On its third anniversary, La Exclusiva opened a second office to start providing products and services in the neighbouring Burgos province – its three supply routes there serve an additional 78 villages and 1000 families. Customers can place orders by sending a message via email or WhatsApp, as well as by a phone or at the point of delivery. progress and re-investing as the company grew. La Exclusiva's social impact is assessed every six months. The next step is to continue to grow the enterprise's customer base, targeting restaurants and care homes. It is also seeking to expand its service offering to include property and nursing services for the elderly. Finally, the project provides a good demonstration of the benefits that can be achieved by up-scaling logistics in rural areas. Such an approach could easily be replicated in other areas affected by declining population. La Exclusiva's mix of social goals, entrepreneurship and the latest technology is a good example of the smart village ethos.

Contact: info@laexclusiva.org, Budget: €3000

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

13. Safety at home (KAT 2) (FI)

Description of the initiative: For the elderly to live a safer, healthier and more active life at home, security management services need new and better working methods. This change challenges the current care system. It requires a new operational model based on rapid recognition of emergencies, and a tighter network of organizations providing safety at home. Successfully restructured services require new thinking. The Safety at Home (KAT 2) project is based on these objectives. Its participants include public organizations, non-profits, private companies, and citizens. The project notably drove the South Carelian Rescue Department and Eksote to pioneer more efficient ways for the many actors working on safety at home to cooperate. The aim of the Safety at Home 2 (KAT 2) project was to build up a network of actors and create a model to efficiently share risk-information and enhance the safety of elderly people living at home.

Within this context, Housing Safety Cards, which were introduced in 2016, will now be electronic and integrated for the operational actions of a network of actors in the villages Rautjärvi and Parikkala of South Carelia.

Main results: Safety at Home has set up a thriving network of actors involved in home security for the elderly. Participants in the network share tasks. Their responsibilities are clearly defined, and communication among partners flows effortlessly. Security technology is recognized as an integral part of the development of a safe home environment.

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14. The IMPROVE project (SE)

Description of the initiative: 'Involving the community to co-produce public services' (IMPROVE) is an e-health project that enhances services for the elderly through smart homecare in Västernorrland, Sweden. The project, supported under the EU's Interreg program, used an open innovation or 'living lab' approach to tailor a sustainable public service solution for homecare in peripheral and sparsely populated areas. IMPROVE began by selecting a network of 'local champions' in the Västernorrland region from those already providing homecare in the area. This process helped to identify four priority areas for e-health services: keyless homecare; cameras for night-time monitoring; sensors for incontinence management; and remote patient care planning involving seven municipalities.

Care workers typically visit hundreds of clients in their homes, requiring staff to carry around with them a high number of keys – and some could easily get lost or fall into the wrong hands. The idea of keyless home access was therefore appealing, thus the project focused on installing keyless lock systems that allow homecare providers to unlock a client's door via a secure app on their phone. Homecare visits are often necessary during the night. In rural areas of Sweden, this can mean that carers have to travel long distances in the dark. Many frail older people find such visits disturbing because they are woken up when carers enter their homes, which is unfortunate as a major reason for nightly visits is to ensure security and a good night's rest for the client. Installing cameras in homes limits the need for travel and any unnecessary disturbance for the client. Furthermore, less time behind the wheel is good for the environment and means more time for patient care. For example, the introduction of 34 cameras meant that overall carers in the region drove 551 km less (equivalent to 9 h 12 min saved working time) per night.

The IMPROVE project also addressed the problem of incontinence, which is not uncommon among its elderly clients. It focused on the use of a sensory device that detects urination patterns and allows individual plans to be drawn up. The project's system tracks patterns over a 72-hour assessment period and its accurate data, superior to manual recordings, enables caregivers to make

more informed decisions for their individual patients. Patient care was further improved through the use of technologies that allow carers to engage their clients remotely. Such care results in time and travel savings – benefitting both the patient and the care provider – and it was taken up by all seven municipalities involved in the project. Plans are also being made for the roll-out of remote care on a larger scale, including at the local hospital.

Main results: The project forms part of a wider initiative to raise the know-how and capacity for innovation in five regions in addition to Västernorrland. Its success in developing technology-driven public services represents a valuable contribution to this initiative. These new services have demonstrable benefits for both the care provider and the care receiver. Other regions could also experience these benefits by replicating IMPROVE's novel methodology. The project team affirm the value of assigning champions and, moreover, the value of taking time to find the right person, even if the process proves to be lengthy.

The project has also shown the benefit of municipalities working together to avoid duplicating each other's efforts. An importance message is that not every municipality needs to do everything. The project is ongoing and the network of champions that it set up will continue after its end. The project coordinator emphasizes that through this network further technological developments will continue to be introduced to raise patient care still higher.

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15. Involving seniors in local nurseries (FI)

Description of the initiative: Iloinen Konkkaronkka (Happy Bunch in English) is a project funded in October 2016 to create connections among the residents of Rämsöö, a countryside village in the town of Vesilahti, Finland. Once a week, local seniors come together to play with the local nursery's children and to also spend quality time with each other. The program is developed and guided by a professional counsellor. Every participant, including the nursery, has a tablet PC to keep in touch with each other from their homes through Skype and to bring new dimensions to the lives of senior citizens.

Main results: Based on the feedback of participants, the nursery and the community, the project has been a great success. The community is now more close-knit and weekly 'get-togethers' have been proven to reduce loneliness in an otherwise remote area. The media has covered the innovative idea of combining seniors, children and digital innovation through various channels. The idea of providing spare-grannies and granddads to the children of a small town and vice-versa has shown to be an effective way to create connections between generations and to integrate newly immigrated families. Most of the set goals have already been reached and the rest will be achieved in the far future.

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EDUCATION

16. Increasing awareness of cultural heritage among rural youth (RO)

Description of the initiative: The Piscu School offers a fascinating glimpse into the riches of Romanian cultural heritage and values. The school owes its foundation to projects run by the Gaspar, Baltasar & Melchior Association, a cultural and educational non-profit organization which has been operating since 2006 in a former pottery center in Piscu village in Ilfov county. The aim of the project is for younger generations to become more aware of their cultural heritage and more sensitive to its beauty and historical relevance. Activities include workshops, summer schools, conferences, cultural heritage books for all ages, a heritage-focused primary school, anthropological research, and an online cultural platform.

Main results: Exploring and developing the potential of Piscu village and raising awareness about cultural and local heritage; Participation in street festivals in and around Bucharest; Demonstrations of crafts; An eco-pier, focused on environmental issues.

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17. Engaging youth in infrastructure design in small towns - commonage summer school (IE)

Description of the initiative: The aim of the Commonage Summer School was to engage young people from the environs of the small town of Callan in County Kilkenny, in Ireland. From 2013 to 2014, the school ran week-long 'Summer Schools' with national and international students of the same age. These schools provided training and social interaction and encouraged students to develop a better group appreciation and understanding of the importance of design in the built environment of a small town.

Commonage included modules in building (local trades), awareness of design, micro-interventions, art processes and built environment. Over two weeks, 40 participants got actively and intensively involved in building four temporary structures in the town, which are being developed by four invited teams of architects and artists. The structures were built mostly from local materials and influenced by local culture. They include a cow shed, a bridge and a modern variant on a local vernacular-style iron gate. The primary benefit of the training was to nurture understanding of the built environment of Callan, with a particular focus on its derelict sites. The promoters have the goal of developing a permanent school of infrastructure design attached to or having links with universities in both Ireland and abroad.

Main results: The development of a greater appreciation of local vernacular design and its possibilities in modern buildings in the local context; The development of links to other countries and to people from a variety of backgrounds

and skill sets (engineers, artists, architects, community development professionals, etc.); The establishment of Callan as a place where discussion of design and construction is taken seriously and with the possibility that the town could develop the 'Commonage school' that is desired.

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18. Online training for time-pressed farmers (AT)

Description of the initiative: Digital training courses by Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut (LFI), part of the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, have been used by 10000 farmers. Such wide-scale reach avoided countless hours travelling to an educational center and its associated environmental toll. As broadband internet access expands into rural areas, the opportunity to offer online training opens up. Under the 'Web-based education for farmers' project, the LFI developed short online courses on subjects such as filling in online application forms, renewing plant protection certification and implementing agri-environmental Measures. Other areas included hygiene and allergies, alpine areas, direct marketing, upgrading computer systems, live-streaming and social media. A notable feature of the courses that was especially appreciated by the participants was that they are available online. It means that they can be taken anywhere and at any time, and thus they do not involve hours of driving. This approach proved to be very popular. One in five of the 50000 farmers participating in Austria's agri-environmental programmes have taken part.

The project estimated that the digital delivery of the course for its 10000 users saved 1.5 million kilometres of travel by car. Farmers commonly work long hours and live in remote areas, and do not generally have the time to travel long distances. The online courses only take a few hours and can be taken (and paused) at any time.

Main results: The long-term legacy is an e-learning platform that is still being used by farmers. Younger farmers in particular are very enthusiastic about using modern technology to become more effective and efficient. But e-learning should be for everyone, and the project highlighted the importance of clearly defining the target group and adapting the training accordingly. The project organizers emphasize that their courses were successful at reaching a wide audience, developing training offers that are useful for farmers across Austria and not limited to specific regions.

The project beneficiary is continuing to add new courses even after the funding ended. For organic farmers, for example, it is now offering a course on procurement of seed, fertilizer, organic plant protection products and animal feed. The project can even be said to have given impetus to the roll-out of broadband internet in rural areas. When farmers experienced the benefits of e-learning, they started to lobby for better internet access.

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19. A school for digital transition in Dordogne (FR)

Description of the initiative: A LEADER project has accompanied local businesses through the process of digital transition. The training is helping entrepreneurs to define coherent digital strategies and identify new opportunities and markets. Job creation and economic development have always been at the heart of the LEADER strategy for the Dordogne in France. LEADER support helped establish a tailored 1-to-10-day web course for local businesses, providing them with the tools to take advantage of the digital economy. The Web Association Bergeracoise (WAB) is a 'web school' that teaches local businesses to design effective strategies that incorporate digital aspects in their operations, communications and marketing. It was the project promoter for the Local Action Group (LAG) 'Pays de Bergerac' which was looking to meet the demand for digital training from small enterprises located in and around the town of Bergerac.

To raise awareness of the initiative, around 2000 companies in the Dordogne area, including 1200 located in the LAG area, were invited to participate in an online questionnaire. The survey was carried out in partnership with the employment department of the local government. It consisted of four main categories of questions regarding: (a) the perception of digital tools; (b) equipment and budget dedicated to digital tools; (c) digital needs; and (d) challenges. The online survey also assessed the willingness of small rural businesses to get involved in the initiative. More than half said that they would like to improve their existing tools, but nearly three quarters said that they lack time to make the digital transition. The WAB then offered free digital audits. They consisted of a two-hour interview with the business manager that resulted in a personalized report on the company's digital preparedness, both in terms of the quality of its equipment and skill sets. The audit also assessed the benefits and costs of digital transition for the individual company. Around 120 businesses in the LAG area participated and are acting on the key recommendations received.

Main results: Following the digital audit, each business manager interviewed could sign up for an individual training path coordinated by the WAB. The 'digital roadmap' consisted of an individually tailored course taken from a selection of 30 vocational courses on digital skills. A total of 48 managers took advantage of this opportunity within the project. The digital transition has the potential to invigorate the Bergerac area. The project has boosted digital skills among small rural businesses and has the wider ambition of making Bergerac a 'digital city'.

Contact: contact@la-wab.fr

CULTURE AND TOURISM

20. The kitchen incubator in zakrzów (PL)

Description of the initiative: A kitchen incubator is a facility with equipment designed for small processors of agricultural products, caterers or farmers, who can prepare and process their products in a well-equipped area designed for the purpose in accordance with health and safety rules. One of the best kitchen incubators in Poland is run in Zakrzów by the Social Company "Smaki Gościńca".

Main results: Over 200 people have used the kitchen to date, with 8 businesses and farmers using it regularly. About 100 products have been developed. Its long-term influence has been to promote sustainable agriculture in the region, and higher incomes for farmers.

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21. Museum of cookbooks (PL)

Description of the initiative: The aim of the Museum of Cookbooks is to increase the sales of high-quality local food products from LAG Dolina Raby. Social innovation actions include: 1) Setting up the social organization "Dolina Raby" to sell local food products through a 'Sale Club' 2) Setting up the Museum of Cookbooks to promote culinary heritage; organizing culinary workshops serviced by a social cooperative 3) Creating food clusters.

Main results: About 20 local food producers involved, and workshops attracting more than 100 participants have been organized.

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22. Wikipedra: collaborative ICT to protect rural dry-stone heritage (ES)

Description of the initiative: The Leader cooperation project "Collaborate4landscape" aims to highlight the value and upgrade rural heritage linked to dry-stone architecture, as an identity element of rural landscapes in Catalonia and other Mediterranean areas, by involving civil society. Several activities have been started as the recuperation and formalisation of the profession of 'dry-stone' artisan, but one of the most successful actions is the platform 'Wikipedra' (Wikistone in English), that has been linked to a mobile app. The tool allows any citizen interested on the topic of dry-stone architecture to contribute to its localization and conservation by using a mobile app. Once the element has been tagged and described, it can be visualized and found on a map of Catalonia and 85 municipalities in France. This tool and collaborative methodology helped improve understanding about the conservation of rural heritage as an indirect service to rural communities.

Main results: 16 000 elements catalogued in Catalan and French; Around 1 000 users since the launch of the app - App downloaded 715 times

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23. GO Eastbelgium (BE)

Description of the initiative: The Local Action Group (LAG) '100 villages - 1 Future' and the Tourism Agency of East Belgium (TAO) wanted to reorganize and revalue the hiking paths in the LEADER-region. The multitude of existing local hiking paths was insufficiently coordinated with the paths in the neighbouring villages and municipalities. The LAG stimulated cooperation between various local stakeholders such as municipalities, interest groups and tourism associations based on the shared interest in promoting the region. The promoters worked together to develop the content which fed the development of an online hiking planner tool, GPS navigation and smartphone app.

Main results: The Virtual Hiking Tours website was visited 22 000 times by 16 500 different users and the Go Eastbelgium app was downloaded 1 200 times.

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24. Armob - Mobile app to experience of ancient reality (DE/LX)

Description of the initiative: In order to visualize how today's archeological sites and antique remains looked like during Roman and Celtic times, a new smartphone application will offer visitors an new type of experience to connect with the past. More than 105 archeological sites - predominantly in Rhineland-Palatinate but also in Luxembourg - are to be registered in the app by 2019. Thanks to the Augmented Reality technique, the visually reconstructed sites are integrated into the actual landscape and surroundings. The ARmob cooperation project involves six Rhineland-Palatinate LAGs and three Luxembourg LAGs and is carried out with the technical support of the Department of Archaeology from the University of Trier.

Main results: The application creates immersive Augmented Reality experiences of the ancient world and provides a contemporary touch to the discovery of archaeological sites. This enormous cooperation project is pooling knowledge from 90 municipalities and numerous local tourism operators from 9 LEADER areas, around the scientific expertise of the University of Trier.

The economic model is relatively simple and seems to have reached sufficient a critical mass in order to become a major innovative tool for the promotion of cultural heritage, with more than a hundred archaeological sites to be visualized with the AR technique, in 3D.

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GEORGIAN EXPERIENCE

Project: SUPPORTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS TO ADOPT INNOVATIVE BUSINESS APPROACHES IN RESPONSE TO COVID 19 CRISIS

Implementer: Kazbegi Local Action Group (LAG)

Period: September 09, 2020 – March 1, 2021

Location(s): Kazbegi Municipality, villages: Stephantsminda, Gergeti, Arsha, Achkhoti, Tkarsheti, Pkhelshe, Sioni, Sno, Pansheti.

Objective: To support sustainable source of income generation for local female entrepreneurs in response to cope with Covid-19 crisis.

Background: Prior to the pandemic, 45% of Kazbegi residents had access to tourism as their main source of income. Among them were women who offered master classes to tourists in various fields. These activities were seasonal and therefore the income was only available during the summer. A preliminary survey of needs of women entrepreneurs conducted by the Kazbegi LAG found that everyone wants to continue their activities and is ready to comply with the new regulations but lack financial means or knowledge, as well as they are struggling to find new ways to offer services in light of low likelihood of foreign tourist visiting Kazbegi in 2020. The majority of entrepreneurs surveyed - 75% - have a personal computer, 65% have the very limited opportunity to make small investments in the business to adapt to new requirements but underlined high demand on technical support and capacity building.

The need for the project was driven by the demands of a new reality caused by the global Coronavirus pandemic. With the traditional approach, with a large flow of tourists in Kazbegi, service providers were able to easily attract customers. The new reality has left local people without a major source of income, and their income is a small domestic farm, the scope of which is very limited in the context of Kazbegi's small land holdings. They do not have the appropriate skills to continue to provide tourism services and attract customers under the new regulations. That's why there was a need to improve technical skills & knowledge in marketing, business practices, and standards, modernize methods and service provision approaches, since there is limited access to trainings, information, innovations and technologies locally.

The needs assessment (by LAG) found that one of the most vulnerable group of service providers in Kazbegi are women individual entrepreneurs who offer different masterclasses, teaching traditional skills and cuisine to visitors to the area. The project intended to build the capacity of women entrepreneurs to adopt to the current crisis by using web-based platforms in order to continue deliver their tourism services remotely, as well as support those who could still provide services locally to adopt the new safety standards and modernize their workshops and introduce new safety practices. Target businesses should have increased their resilience to future shocks, and provide a demonstration for others on how to introduce internet-based technologies for service delivery.

Activities performed and results:

3 trainings were delivered for selected 19 beneficiaries about COVID-19 related regulations and also about basic principles of video marketing and effective use of the online platforms (virtually and online), where participants were introduced to the opportunities and basic principles of effective presentation of their services. The trainers had also provided remote consultations for project beneficiaries for 1 month.



Kazbegi LAG members inspected beneficiaries if they were able to provide their masterclasses directly to customers. 10 beneficiaries received equipment for health safety and were provided personal with consultations about newly adopted health safety standards; and were afterwards inspected once more. 3 video masterclasses of beneficiaries were uploaded on different web pages (e.g. Airbnb) and 19 videos were uploaded on YouTube channel. As of March 2021, 19 videos had 9774 views and 373 likes for 19 videos in total.

In Kazbegi municipality, the tourist season starts in spring and summer is considered to be the most active period. As the result of the project, beneficiaries are already ready for the tourist season in fulfilment of COVI-19 regulations. They can already receive the guests. Beneficiaries also gained experience working on a previously unknown online platforms for them, which will allow them to sell their “product/services” online and thus earn additional income, not just from current activities. 19 jobs have been saved as well and beneficiaries have learned about the benefits of digital ecosystem, they plan to learn more and develop their skills. Furthermore, beneficiaries of the project noted:

- Involvement in a similar project has, for the most part, not only been a means of learning new, gaining alternative experiences, but also a source of hope and new ideas.
- By creating videos and posting them on webpages, they have realized that it could be very important for promotion of their products and services. They have realized that internet and social media has large influence in marketing.
- Although beneficiaries live in same municipality, they got to know each other, each other’s abilities and discovered that there are many interesting, professional and knowledgeable people of local traditions on the ground, whose business activities and presentation with the help of technological means will make Kazbegi Municipality even more attractive.
- Project has increased self-confidence of beneficiaries and they saw their daily activities now as business opportunity.

Budget: 13,081USD

MASTERCLASS VIDEOS:

1. <https://youtu.be/y5M3rkLUa0>
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=burBt6HgANQ&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR-2lg4GSBvTF82kcr7XGd1kV3O13qn5zKtkyMT8BgFvj_KBLJvCe6MMXUIs&ab_channel=natal
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR2ZV-pKzahpRosevzVNTkjRwoE7F-nos2sO9FIWMkaltpiTeZjsx1IP-No4&v=O5XgRBvnevEc&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=MindiaGudushauri
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RZeN0fGVhQ&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0mQiHtD2RjR9zZoQ7TqyO7wxHB83dCRReao9qdQqCR_ApmACwoDHlg-Pz0&ab_channel=NaziChkareuli
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR0OK8CSY74ng_LeAsuqawfO9P5QvCXIjYuWtnkpSY1LzB1I1ZVjBUKvB0c&v=3liTj29-4ol&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=londamaisuradze https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ju7NW-1tEelE&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0OK8CSY74ng_LeAsuqawfO9P5QvCXIjYuWtnkpSY1LzB1I1ZVjBUKvB0c&ab_channel=londamaisuradze
6. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyzwbDHUNrg&fbclid=IwAR39gGL-93Ce3YES-HhdS4SosciUG7AXkzet_nkZ7DgKN36tQR2gifUAew4Y&ab_channel=tsitsiadavitashvili
7. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jupYo5ABaS4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3WTMB4rTm86T3k63JbCEWdTxBVZ61B933LtyOCO7t1ZtwoFRu_7-5yLE8s&ab_channel=laboratorylumier
8. https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR1u9vNpapkrNjvvbIP7ssYTyM2qbHD-q08V4n0OM0ttjomRDIqqxsVIRzNE&v=bD6-cncaoiU&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=NatiaMarsagishvili
9. https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR2knX8rj90s0ZxCwwtNURy62eVa5C-qMe0soSBxNnDqN7-Lz5THP610eVDk&v=Q3D2QW_fZLg&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=NunuSujashvili
10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR2P5iBV8SkLO0HIzWPO4ZTZpK-ZLK2AM_ebbbgep3qtWwp_VISk2SFX0Ew&v=7ZWSPOCWkT0&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=GiuliTsamalaidze
11. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12FOUP71giU&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR-08hXEPZ90wHKnRF21MzFmSnQLauc_hM0G6vXbSdYCjyGu6g3HljH2LiM&ab_channel=lizichqareuli
12. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR_PnKAxTLU&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR3p6frCnn9sJ-q41Xy_fWgF2bzbjAjbahRv299kSljyElaPukARzkDq-cE&ab_channel=lizichqareuli

13. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etjSjKcIFuY&fbclid=IwAR3Ji0RqVwSWQa-kxuYuyo5raANeg_OUGUh4tVXiUhF9bwpLiKwEc4FeA_og
14. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZFOHjPp30o&fbclid=IwAR280f2IkD1Hrkoy-mCGaXPmKPHKJczupEJBvSo9RigmglNh_pSsfgETbwul
15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS0ali5OnGA&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR-1b38y9hx9ZXLoBwhGGT1BGBr6DDrkHhZ8SpTiYuAwWJLz7AHkZ6ZVNd5k>
16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcOo-jfMXEo&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR2e74vBG-yQWUfotzuowdyr3qN9EcsMphRIhrzEXyJMoakRvq32Zgti2Co>
17. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlw7Rv6tbII&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR2h-fQa0Hj_nLUgqRZFLIVk5gN0jMNRCL4SBI1ncmbP3knn2IO77x_m_0
18. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd4dM9xV4S8&fbclid=IwAR137klTrQ5ITWO_XEVQssxaltfLvsYMfT98W_q18Y8aSBe1ztL7JjHcsAk
19. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRHif0gOsko&ab_channel=Ketinohouse

Project: THE YOUTH HUB FOR EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Implementer: Akhalkalaki Local Action Group (LAG)

Period: September 09, 2020 – March 1, 2021

Location(s): Akhalkalaki Municipality, communities Khaveti and Gogasheni

Objective: Increased literacy and awareness in different areas of knowledge in the most remote villages of Akhalkalaki municipality

Background: Akhalkalaki municipality is largely populated with ethnic Armenian population. Baseline Study of the Community Problems and Needs conducted for Akhalkalaki LDS identified scarcity of education, training and outreach in the villages. Lack of knowledge of national and English languages hinders social integration. Youth are missing opportunities to further education in Georgia or abroad. Educational infrastructure is missing the basic amenities including IT facilities. ITC literacy is low. Economy is undiversified, without innovations, occupying self-employed people mostly in the poorly advanced traditional agriculture. Lack of basic socio-economic welfare, educational and cultural services stimulating high level of youth labor migration is noticeable.

In response to one of the primary objectives of the LDS (improving social integration by fostering education, culture, youth and gender equality), Akhalkalaki LAG, established a Training Center. The center provides joint certified courses in English and Georgian languages, Accounting, Financial Management and Art. Despite trainings were provided free of charge initially in the city center, people's enrollment from villages was poor. The fact is that villages are far from the city, municipal transportation is poorly developed, time to commute for attending the regular trainings is scarce. This project was intended extend the coverage of the training center throughout the municipality and make knowledge/educational services accessible in the villages. Hence, more people living in the villages would have access and opportunities to get enrolled, learn/acquire new skills and knowledge in different subjects/areas through applied modern technologies of digital innovation. Community Khaveti is an Armenian settlement and community Gogasheni is a Georgian settlement. Communities are one of the most remote (more than 30km away from city) and disadvantaged with limited access to welfare.

It was intended that establishing the educational, digital youth hubs would benefit not only the youth and women but also the entire population of Khaveti and Gogasheni communities. It was envisaged that apart from trainings provided for youth and women by the training center of LAG, local farmers will have an opportunity to access different online trainings too. In addition to that, schoolteachers would receive different capacity building support online.

Activities performed and results: Two the most remote from town and vulnerable villages (one Armenian settlement and one Georgian) were selected: Gogasheni and Khaveti. In these target villages, at the premises of the local community schools the project established the educational, digital youth hubs. These hubs opened new opportunities to the local pupils, youths, females and farmers to access knowledge remotely through online trainings, seminars or other educational activities. The project ensured that the training space for the hubs provided by the school administration are renovated, furnished and equipped sufficiently to operate in proper manner. The project delivered trainings for 139 participants from both villages in Georgian and English languages, gender equality, emotional intelligence, and climate smart agriculture methods.

Outside the activities implemented and the benefits delivered by the project, currently the hubs are actively used by schools. For instance, the schools are using the hubs in providing various online classes. Currently, the Khaveti school is providing online classes in English language, while Gogasheni is providing online classes in Geography and Russian language.

Budget: USD 15,000



Project: SMARTVILLE

Implementer: Tetrtskaro Local Action Group (LAG)

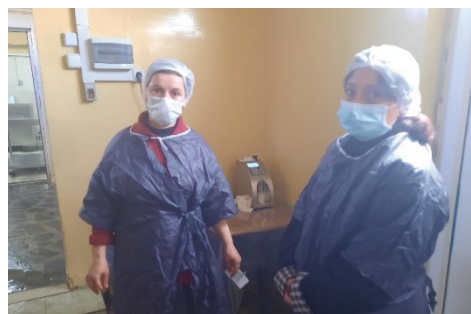
Period: October 2020 – March 2021

Location(s): Kvemo Kartli region, Tetrtskaro municipality

Objective: To build resilience of local communities through introduction of innovative solutions for B2B trade and networking.

Background: To assist SMEs in the regions facing above mentioned challenges, building up on community strength and addressing the post pandemic situation the project aimed to improve local business environment including access to financial literacy learning engines and finding source, tourism related value chains and access to regional and national through their inclusion in information management systems and regional networks across Georgia with further expansion to Eastern Partnership and EU countries. The project intended to contribute for achievement of the goal through using ICT to reduce cost and technical barriers in accessing regional markets and reducing cost of trade, facilitating access to B2B events and creation of regional networks of local producers and private sector, promoting ICT and e-commerce solutions for SMEs and supporting organizations to assist their members to increase exports and have capacity to analyze market data and industry trends. This could also serve as a solution for future possible COVID-19 pandemic restrictions supporting sustainability of market and developing new opportunities for rural population.

Activities performed and results: Tetrtskaro LAG project team, in close collaboration with RDFG, worked towards achieving project objectives defined under the Output 1: Needs assessment is conducted and incorporated into the portal; Output 2: The most part of the portal is developed and ready to use; and Output 3: Indicator 3.3/ B2B events were successfully conducted, and they brought together business associations, producers, public actors, local SMEs.



The purpose of the Needs-Assessment was to collect and analyse existing opportunities/barriers to the entrepreneurship value chain in Tetrtskaro municipality as well as available ICT resources and respective community needs, with a subsequent focus on poverty alleviation and growth. The objective of the Needs-Assessment was to give the project team and partners an understanding of the current socio-economic conditions, market, and information access challenges of the targeted SMEs and to define recommendations for the SmartVille portal to provide respective information/support and address revealed constraints/challenges.

B2B event were organized to facilitate establishment of networks, addressing the crosscutting gaps and barriers identified under Result 1, create access to regional markets, exchange of learning in overcoming barriers related to value chains, SME/business management, access to finances, etc. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, most of the meetings were held remotely. This intervention included close partnership with other LEADER Municipalities. For example, trainer/expert of rafting from Borjomi Municipality have been invited to meet local actors involved in tourism sector and discuss on the potential of developing rafting in Tetrtskaro Municipality as local rivers have such

potential. Also, in close cooperation with Lagodekhi LAG, representatives of local dry-fruit enterprises met the same product producers for Lagodekhi Municipality, as a result, the producers agreed to establish a Cooperative to strengthen future cooperation and increase the sales. Both during the Needs-Assessment and at the B2B meetings it was recognized that there is a delivery service problem across the municipality. As a result of the active involvement of the parties participating in the meetings, a delivery service was established in the town of Tetrtskaro.

As part on the partnership, within the project Tetrtskaro LAG, Tetrtskaro Youth Centre and University of Georgia conducted workshops for local young entrepreneurs. A four-day training on Digital Skills Development was conducted for 11 young entrepreneurs. In total, 29 B2B events have been organized within the project, 23 of them held remotely, 6 - face to face. 62 people participated on the meetings, among them 41 were women and 21 men.

SMARTVILLE portal was developed that will improve local business environment including access to financial literacy learning engines and finding source, tourism related value chains through their inclusion in information management systems and regional networks. Based on Needs-Assessment findings following main categories of the portal were identified and developed:

- Market Place - It gives opportunity to sell any kind of goods (agricultural and non-agricultural) according to the pre-defined categories. It is also possible to add certain description that is out of proposed categories, but it reduce the chance for search engines. The information for delivery service is also provided. Customers have opportunity to see products according to the pre-defined categories and use search engines.
- E-Learning – Section “Trainings and Workshops” gives opportunity to provide remote trainings and consultancy according to customers’ requirements through the wide network of consultancy and training service providers. In case of interest of obtaining different skills and competences, the customer will be linked to the respective VET institutions proposing required curriculums. The portal gives opportunity to get acquainted with teaching programs presented higher education institutions to make informed decision on proper career planning.
- Financial Resources – it includes information on Excess to the grant opportunity database; Wide range of bank products linked to consultancy services of business planning and technology learning. Also, this section provides opportunity for investors to identify potential investment project, on other hand the startups might find the investors for their projects.
- The platform will have special space for B2B-meetings as a pre-arranged, targeted appointments dedicated to get buyers and exhibitors to meet. Accordingly, B2B-meetings section will give an ideal opportunity for small and medium-sized businesses, as well as for large scale ones, to build connections and to find new clients and potential cooperation partners.

SmartVille united the publications and different type of information on the following topics: Food Safety Standards; Relevant National Legislation; Custom Regulations; Contact information of Consultancy Companies. After presenting the concept of the portal on different stakeholder and B2B meetings, it gained a interest and lots of recommendations have been received. Taking this into account, Tetrtskaro LAG and RDFG agreed that the site would be more comprehensive and mul-

tifunctional. For example, an SMS notification function will be built into the site, which will make possible for users to receive messages on their smartphones about the service/information they are interested in. RDFG will be organizing the introductory session (virtual or physical, depends on the situation with the Covid 19), meanwhile the demo-version of the portal is available on the following link <https://srulad.org/> and will be imported to the three main domains (smartvillage.ge; smartville.ge; smartvilly.ge) as soon as it's testing completed.

The main challenge during the reporting period was the difficulty of holding face-to-face meetings with the project target audience due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, most of the meetings have been moved to the online space. Although restrictions for face-to-face meetings were cancelled after some time, participants still preferred to keep the engagement online even after the situation in the country has improved.

Budget: USD 15,000

Project: AGRICULTURE SYSTEM MAPPING OF DEDOPLISTSKARO MUNICIPALITY

Implementer: Georgian Farmers' Association (GFA)

Period: September 2020 – April 2021

Location(s): The entire Dedoplistskaro municipality (town and 15 villages)

Objective: The goal of the grant was to have Dedoplistskaro municipality population a full information of municipality's agriculture and food system and that linkages are established with different actors including input suppliers and service providers through Agro Map of Dedoplistskaro Municipality integrated in an innovative Agronavti website.

Background: Agriculture is one of the main economic sectors in Dedoplistskaro municipality. It is a home of the Shiraki valley – “a bread basket” of Georgia. In addition, Samukhi valley is the largest winter pasture in Georgia, hosting most of the Georgia's sheep population and also cattle during winter. The leading value chains of the agricultural sector are livestock breeding (sheep, cow), cereal (wheat, barley) and sunflower growing. Although, the municipality has a larger size of agricultural lands than other municipalities in Georgia, still the share of the agriculture sector in municipality's GDP is rather modest. The main challenges hindering agricultural development are lack of irrigation water, long droughts, lack of windbreaks, lack of veterinary services, weak pasture management, etc. Besides these hindering factors, the lack of digitally available information on agricultural actors and services, especially during pandemics, e.g. COVID-19, hinders the development of the sector. 7500 agricultural holdings in Dedoplistskaro municipality were direct beneficiaries of the project.

Activities performed and results: Based on the information collected by desk review and data collection 135 agriculture related Businesses in Dedoplistskaro municipality were identified, profile developed and uploaded on the website. Gathered information was verified with interviews conducted with key stakeholders of agribusiness in Dedoplistskaro and identified agro system actors. Because of COVID-19 outbreak and followed restrictions, the telephone interviews and only one field trip was conducted to Dedoplistskaro, that allowed to identify 135 stakeholders. Agro Map for Dedoplistskaro was developed accordingly and is available on www.agromap.ge. Google Map was linked to the website which enables the viewers to easily identify addresses of different stakeholders. Two promo video tutorials and 10 social media posters regarding the project and Agromap.ge have been created and posted on GFA's Facebook page. In addition, SMS Marketing is utilized in order to reach the target audience. Moreover, Agromap.ge was presented to the leading representatives of the agricultural sector, Government, business sector and international partners at a conference organized by GFA on April 12th, 2021. Identification of agribusiness actors of Dedoplistskaro Municipality appeared to be challenging. Initially the project team was not able to collect enough information because of COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions to travel. However, after conducting a one field trip to the municipality the additional actors were identified.

Budget: USD 13,966.67