

# Taskforce Action Plan – Belgium, Wallonia

*Version 4 (September 2022)*

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## 1. Context

The Smart Villages (SV) process in Wallonia is mainly driven by 3 categories of actors:

- **LAGs** that have become familiar with the SV concept and the SV operational approach through the concrete implementation of solutions on their territory;
- **The Economic Development Agencies** of the Provinces of Luxembourg and Namur, which have smart managers/departments who support the municipalities of their province in the implementation of smart projects;
- The **Digital Agency (Digital Wallonia)**, which supports the emergence of smart projects through calls for projects and support for other provinces so that they also have a smart manager and implement "smart territories" actions.

## 2. The purpose of the taskforce

### Key policy areas of taskforce interventions

- ✓ Ensure that the Smart Villages concept and rural aspects are integrated within the future call for projects of Digital Wallonia on 'smart territories'.
- ✓ Bringing together representatives of different EU funds (for a multi-funded approach)
- ✓ Advancing Smart Villages planning and dialogue in a specific regional context (especially in the Provinces of Luxembourg and Namur)

In the context described above, the first purpose of setting up a working group would be to **analyse and disseminate the experiences acquired in the Walloon context** by the actors mentioned above to other rural actors unfamiliar with the process/approach in order to **prepare them in particular to respond to the future call for "smart territories" projects**, which should be launched by Digital Wallonia in 2022.

Through the work of the Taskforce, the gradual networking of the main rural actors concerned by the SV approach should make it possible **to identify/define/specify the challenges** to be met (awareness and training of local actors, establishment of IT infrastructure, complementarity between territorial development tools, creation of digital hubs, etc.) and how to respond to them (policy to be put in place, tools and support to be put in place/strengthened, etc.)

## 3. Links to existing Smart Village exchanges

The actions are directly linked to communication/awareness actions carried out by the Walloon Network for Rural Development on the subject (see below).

## 4. Membership

The members already responded positively to join the SV taskforce are all involved in the Walloon "smart ecosystem": design or operational implementation of Smart policies.

Several stakeholders of the “smart” Walloon ecosystem, various members and partners of the Walloon Rural Development Network (RwDR) took part in the Taskforce’s work (see Annex I), including:

- LAGs
- Provincial Economic Development Agency (Regional smart city referents)
- ADL (Local Development Agency)
- Thematic experts
- Natural parks
- University of Namur
- German-speaking community Administration

## 5. Planned actions

### 5.1 Taskforce meetings

The Walloon Network for Rural Development (RwDR), in close collaboration with Digital Wallonia, has begun a preliminary work of **reflection on the “smart” issues and challenges of Walloon rural territories** in order to help Digital Wallonia to calibrate the future call for “smart rural territories” projects.

This first step was followed **by a meeting of the Permanent Commission of the Walloon Rural Development Network** (24 February 2022) on the theme of smart territories.

The objective is to initiate and continue the work of raising the awareness of rural development actors and Walloon rural territories to smart issues. It is also from Wallonia's point of view **to better identify the needs and priorities** of rural development actors in this area in the context of regional calls for projects dedicated to this theme and in the context of the next European programming (Long-term vision for rural areas and Rural Pact).

Timing	Focus of meeting
24 February 2022	Meeting of the RwDR Steering Committee dedicated to the theme "smart territories"
1 April 2022	First meeting of the taskforce at the Fernelmont coworking space. Building a shared vision of the concept of smart territories. Analysis of the challenges of rural municipalities and the needs of rural development actors in terms of smart territory, formulation of recommendations and identification of good practices/case studies to be capitalised on – theme studied collectively: Economic development Presentation by Olivier Vergeynst: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is responsible digital</li> <li>▪ Activities and mandate of the Belgian Institute for Sustainable IT asbl/vzw</li> </ul>
27 April 2022	Second taskforce meeting at the e-square (Marche-en-Famenne). Analysis of the challenges of rural municipalities and the needs of rural development actors in terms of smart

	<p>territory, formulation of recommendations and identification of good practices/case studies to be capitalized on – themes studied collectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Energy</li> <li>▪ Environment</li> <li>▪ Biodiversity</li> </ul> <p>Presentation of the “smart” strategy of Marche-en-Famenne and Presentation/visit of the e-square (<a href="https://e-square.marche.be/">https://e-square.marche.be/</a> - Coworking, FabLab and business incubator)</p> <p>Presentation of the BiomMap project (municipality of Wasseiges): <a href="https://www.biommap.be/">https://www.biommap.be/</a></p>
18 May 2022	<p>Third meeting of the taskforce at TRAKK in Namur. Analysis of the challenges of rural municipalities and the needs of rural development actors in terms of smart territory, formulation of recommendations and identification of good practices/case studies to be capitalised on – themes studied collectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mobility</li> <li>▪ Quality of life</li> <li>▪ Data and human resources at the local level</li> <li>▪ Participation</li> </ul> <p>Presentation of TRAKK (<a href="https://www.trakk.be/">https://www.trakk.be/</a>) and the “Regards crossed” operation in the Province of Namur (Crossing between issues of municipalities and contributions from digital experts in order to design innovative projects)</p>

## 5.2 Outcomes

### Shared vision of the concept of smart territories

Unanimously, the Taskforce first wished to recall that digital is only a tool for the benefit of territorial development and that technology is not an end in itself. The Taskforce shares the concept vision of smart territories as proposed by the Walloon NSU:

- Far from the technical and urban approach (the smart city defined in the 2000s)
- Starts with citizens and relies on collective intelligence to engage in reflection and coordinated and effective collective action.
- Concerns cities as well as peri-urban and rural areas.
- Relies on data and technology, but these are not an end in themselves, they are a way to meet challenges to imagine the territory of tomorrow and in particular to put in place transition procedures in favour of a territory that:
  - is less polluted and polluting, less noisy, less spread out,
  - where travel is limited and sustainable,
  - where it is possible to produce and consume locally,

- where services are shared,
- where people can work remotely,
- where new solidarities and ‘sociabilities’ are developing.

Taskforce also noted:

- that the smart territory can be at the service of the reintroduction of services in rural territory,
- that digital technology can be a lever to energise territories,
- that the digital development of a territory can take different paths, there is not a single model.

Moreover, in the light of the Covid crisis, which has accelerated the digital transformation, projects that were rather marginal before the crisis are now being considered in a new light, and new development opportunities have emerged for rural territories, namely in favour of actions that contribute to short-distance or relocation business models: teleworking, coworking, e-commerce, distributed production, circular economy, etc.

The crisis has come to legitimise or at the very least reinforce the demands and reflections in favour of better territorial balances, in favour of a model of redeployment of activity in rural territories, of research of attractiveness of the outskirts, of good relations between town and countryside, territorial network and more generally strong public policies around rurality and small towns.

But the crisis has also shown even more strongly that while digital development is an opportunity, it also has a social (digital divide) and environmental (severity issue) cost and impacts, particularly in terms of data sovereignty.

### 5.3 Recommendations of the Taskforce

The in-depth examination of each smart city theme enabled the Taskforce to make common observations and therefore to formulate not only thematic recommendations but also cross-cutting recommendations.

#### 5.3.1 Cross-cutting recommendations on the use of digital technologies

##### a. Connectivity

**Connectivity remains a major challenge** for many rural areas, which still have certain white and grey areas. To develop new uses and new services, in rural areas as elsewhere, HD/THD connectivity is a prerequisite.

##### b. Mutualisation

**The human and financial resources of rural municipalities being limited**, pooling is a natural solution when it comes to finding sustainable economic models to acquire or develop and maintain digital tools or services whose licenses are often calculated on a pro rata basis. number of users / inhabitants.

Sharing and pooling resources is also desirable from the point of view of the end user. The needs of the municipalities being largely similar, it is reasonable to propose the most common solutions possible in order not to multiply the tools and risk losing the citizen rather than helping him at a time when the digital divide has widened further.

When solutions exist off the shelf, pooling can take the form of purchasing groups, go through central offices. In general, public contracts for technological projects are sometimes very complex and require support (intermunicipal, regional, etc.).

In terms of skills and human resources (smart city manager, IT specialist, etc.), reflection could also be carried out on the pooling of staff via groups of employers.

Finally, the public/private partnership can also be a solution for sharing the risks inherent in the development of digital tools.

### c. Replicability

In all cases, **replicability is desirable** for solutions implemented at the local level for the benefit of the general interest, via documentation, knowledge sharing, networking of actors, etc.

### d. Supra-municipality

**The relevant scale for pooling or developing certain services is generally not the municipal scale.** Conversely, it is not necessarily regional. This question of scale to propose a response to a local need should systematically be the subject of an analysis before initiating any development: does the neighbouring municipality has the same needs? Does the proposed solution go beyond the framework of the living area? Can an intermunicipal company help?

“Supra-municipality” is often a relevant scale for carrying out actions. In this sense, the LAGs and intermunicipal organisations are major resources for municipalities in search of engineering and resources. They are interlocutors capable of putting the needs of the municipalities into perspective and capable of integrating them into a strategic vision.

### e. Open source

Faced with the budgetary constraints of municipalities but also from an ethical point of view (digital sovereignty, data, etc.), the open source track remains relevant for rural development actors.

### f. Interoperability

With the same objective of efficiency underpinned by pooling and the search for consistency of solutions for the end user, the services offered by local players must be interoperable.

### g. Responsible digital

The Taskforce observed that despite a reminder of sustainability in the prerequisites of the smart regional policy (DigitalWallonia), the environmental impact is unfortunately at the bottom of the ranking in the concerns of the municipalities when they characterise a smart project (cf. Smart City Institute Barometer 2021: environmental

impact sought by 6% of municipalities). In this sense, it is emphasised that the environmental impact of digital solutions must be more fully assessed.

#### **h. Animation**

When resources are invested in the development of digital tools at the local level, the **animation necessary to facilitate their adoption** (to grow the community of users in particular) should not be neglected.

#### **i. Social innovation**

Since data and technology are only means (see above: shared vision) at the service of territorial development, social innovation remains at the heart of the drivers of the development of rural territories. The smart development of territories requires collective intelligence and the enhancement of the social capital of territories.

### **5.3.2 Methodological recommendations**

Beyond the cross-cutting recommendations and making it possible to support the “smart territories” dynamic in Wallonia, the Taskforce has also issued methodological recommendations:

- **Importance of sharing best practices and networking** and of course sharing solutions (objective of pooling and replicability). All the participants are applicants in order to build skills.
- The debate still **seems immature on the subject of smart in several territories** (the only entry point being the legal context: dematerialisation and municipal e-counter), and in this respect there are still many blockages and brakes to be removed. It is therefore essential to continue the awareness-raising work (for representatives, technicians, citizens).
- Similarly one has to be able to **support change**.
- Attention must be paid by local actors to the proper articulation and consistency between their objectives with regard to the different strategic frameworks (Smart Region, Leader, etc.) in the absence of consistency provided by the Region itself.

### **5.3.3 Thematic recommendations**

As a reminder, the purpose of the Taskforce was also to analyse the challenges of rural municipalities and the needs of rural development actors in terms of smart territories, formulate recommendations and identify good practices/case studies to capitalise on. The themes studied collectively were:

- Economic development
- Energy
- Environment
- Biodiversity
- Mobility
- Quality of life



- Data and human resources at the local level
- Participation

Thematic recommendations, making it possible to meet the challenges identified for the development of rural territories, have been formulated as well as the identification of inspiring “smart” responses already implemented in Wallonia. These thematic recommendations are the subject of a separate document currently being validated (expected to be completed by September 2022) by the members of the Taskforce.

## 6. Taskforce impact & next steps

Transmission of the results of the Taskforce's work to Digital Wallonia/Digital Agency so that this body responsible for defining the framework of the future regional project call "Smart territories" draws it as closely as possible to the needs of the field. Results, lessons and recommendations were presented to two representatives of Digital Wallonia on 8 July 2022. Digital Wallonia worked on the framework of the "smart territories" call for projects based on these findings.

The Taskforce intends to continue its work and strengthen the Walloon “smart” ecosystem through **exchanges of good practices, field visits and intervention by experts.**





## Annex I: List of members

## Membership of the Taskforce

Name of member	Name of organisation of member	Type of organisation (policy, village, research, NGO, private...)	Short description of role of organisation in the taskforce (reason why member was included)	Member on GROOP?	Participated in 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting?	Participated in 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting?	Participated in 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting?
Benoit Aurele	GAL Nov'Ardenne	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X	X	
Burnotte Florian	GAL Romana	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	
Dalimier Joséphine	UNamur	University	research	/	X		
Dinon Sandrine	Ministère de la Comm. germanophone, service développement régional	Policy	Representative of regional authorities	/	X	X	X
Dubois Aurélie	IDETA	Provincial Développement Agency	Smart Manager	/	X		
Flémal Blanche	in BW	Provincial Développement Agency	Smart Manager	/	X	X	X
Guillaume Baptiste	GAL Entre Sambre et Meuse	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	
Hanoteaux Catherine	GAL de la Botte du Hainaut	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X		
Hick Aurélie	GAL Pays de l'Ourthe	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	
Installé Nicolas	FuturoCité	Research		/	X		
Jamiet Marie-Lyne	GAL ESEM	LAG	Local stakeholder	/			X
Jaumotte Julien	GAL Romana	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	
Keresztes Marine	IGRETEC	Provincial Développement Agency	Smart Manager	/	X		X
Lamotte Thomas	GAL Romana	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	



Laureys François	BEP	Provincial Developpement Agency	Smart Manager	/	X	X	X
Leclercq Aurélie	GAL ESEM	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	
Muller Benoit	IDELUX	Provincial Developpement Agency	Smart Manager	/		X	
Pecheur Jean-Francois	Gal Pays des Condruces	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X	X	X
Piazza Vanessa	ADL de Héron	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X	X	X
Polomé Lucas	GAL de l'Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X	X	X
Radoux Lucas	GAL Pays des Tiges et Chavées et GAL Condroz-Famenne	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X	X	
Remacle Patricia	Gal Jesuishesbignon.be	LAG	Local stakeholder	/			X
Roberti Fabienne	SPI, agence de développement territorial pour la province de Liège	Provincial Developpement Agency	Smart Manager	/		X	X
Toussaint Geoffrey	Parc naturel de Gaume	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X	X	X
Trésegnie Jean-Pierre	GAL MEUSE@CAMPAGNES	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	X
Vandersteen Quentin	GAL Culturalité en Hesbaye brabançonne ASBL	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X	X	X
Vergeynst Olivier	Institut Belge du Numérique Responsable asbl	LAG	Local stakeholder	/	X		
Wilkin Jeanne	Pays de Famenne	LAG	Local stakeholder	/		X	

## Annex II: Meeting Reports

### 1<sup>st</sup> Smart Villages Taskforce Meeting – BE - Wallonia

#### Purpose of the meeting

Building of a shared vision of the concept of smart territories. Analysis of the challenges of rural municipalities and the needs of rural development actors in terms of smart territory, formulation of recommendations and identification of good practices/case studies to be capitalized on – theme studied collectively: Economic development

#### Date of the meeting

1 April 2022

#### Location

Fernelmont Coworking

#### Participation

See annex 5.2

#### Main outcomes & lessons learnt (including deviations from initial plan)

See point 5.2

#### Next steps

2nd Smart Villages Taskforce Meeting

#### Supporting documents

[Please provide any agenda, presentations, videos/ recordings, training material as separate files – if applicable]

#### The event in pictures



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Smart Villages Taskforce Meeting – BE - Wallonia

### Purpose of the meeting

Building of a shared vision of the concept of smart territories. Analysis of the challenges of rural municipalities and the needs of rural development actors in terms of smart territory, formulation of recommendations and identification of good practices/case studies to be capitalized on – theme studied collectively:

- Energy
- Environment
- Biodiversity

### Date of the meeting

27 April 2022

### Location

e-square – Marche-en-Famenne

### Participation

See annex 1

### Main outcomes & lessons learnt (including deviations from initial plan)

See point 5.2

### Next steps

3rd Smart Villages Taskforce Meeting

### Supporting documents

[Please provide any agenda, presentations, videos/ recordings, training material as separate files – if applicable]

### The event in pictures



### 3<sup>rd</sup> Smart Villages Taskforce Meeting – BE - Wallonia

#### Purpose of the meeting

Building of a shared vision of the concept of smart territories. Analysis of the challenges of rural municipalities and the needs of rural development actors in terms of smart territory, formulation of recommendations and identification of good practices/case studies to be capitalized on – theme studied collectively:

- Mobility
- Quality of life
- Data and human resources at the local level
- Participation

#### Date of the meeting

18 May 2022

#### Location

TRAKK - Namur

#### Participation

See annex 1

#### Main outcomes & lessons learnt (including deviations from initial plan)

See point 5.2

#### Next steps

Transmission of the results of the Taskforce's work to DigitalWallonia/Digital Agency so that this body responsible for defining the framework of the future regional project call "Smart territories" draws it as closely as possible to the needs of the field.

The Taskforce intends to continue its work and strengthen the Walloon "smart" ecosystem through exchanges of good practices, field visits and intervention by experts.

#### Supporting documents

[Please provide any agenda, presentations, videos/ recordings, training material as separate files – if applicable]

#### The event in pictures

