



Ovenhausen

Country: Germany

Inhabitants: 1050

Type of area: Sparsely populated

Governance: Self organised local governance body

Administrative level: lower than LAU2



About Ovenhausen



In the course of a territorial reform in 1970, Ovenhausen, which had been an independent municipality until then, became a district of the county capital Höxter. The county of the same name is located on the western edge of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. As one of over 300 LEADER regions in Germany, the Höxter county seeks to actively involve citizens in the development of the area. Seven kilometres west of the county capital, the **village Ovenhausen** is situated in a scenic basin being part of an elongated valley at the upper part of the Weser River.



The **decision of the local community to jointly experiment with digital technologies was inspired by a longer tradition of civic engagement** in the village. Already in 1977, for example, the village received an award in a national competition for its intact village life. Since then, a number of dedicated projects such as a "social village café" have been initiated to promote social cohesion within the local community, thereby involving villagers and newcomers across generations. Following the foundation of a local Caritas group as an independent association in 1982, the parish council has taken an active role in shaping the development of the village, together with several local associations, in order to keep Ovenhausen attractive as a place to live even in changing times. In this context, experimentation with digital technologies has played an important role for some time now. A **jointly developed vision statement** is based on the conviction that the general trend towards digitalisation will also have a lasting impact on life in the village.

Smartness of Ovenhausen



The parish council, together with other local stakeholders, have developed a **shared vision of how digital applications could be used to improve day-to-day life in the village**. In doing so, they were inspired by the concept of the "Caring Community" according to which the residents support each other, in the future increasingly by digital means. Beyond the parish council, all local associations and voluntary groups are committed to this vision. The successful application of the village in 2016 to participate in a **project jointly initiated by the LEADER regions Höxter and Lippe** was then the initial spark for a **process of joint experimentation with digital technologies by the villagers** that continues until now. A participatory approach is always taken, driven by local citizens volunteering their time and involving all local stakeholders. From the beginning, it was clear that the **use of digital technologies in the everyday life of citizens also requires new skills**. Therefore, 10 volunteers were initially trained as digital experts who make their newly acquired skills available to all villagers free of charge. In addition, a **digital app called "Village Broadcast"** was developed by means of a co-creation process. It enables **news sharing and social exchange within the village community**. Almost 80% of the residents have subscribed to the app, so that by now every household has access to the app at least via a family member. Ovenhausen is now exploring possibilities to use **digital technologies for supporting health care and nursing in the village**.

The Smart Journey of Ovenhausen

Establishing community meeting point



The opening of the **"social village café"** (Klöncafé) was initiated by the local Caritas group by converting the vacant vicarage into a social meeting place for everyone in the community e.g. villagers, newcomers, new citizens, parents and grandparents with children and grandchildren. The Caritas members were supported by voluntary helpers. As a result, local craftsmen, Caritas members, local banks and the Caritas Foundation together created a social meeting place for the whole village. There are weekly gatherings organised for community members with home baked cakes and tea. The "social village café" is also used for evening events such as meetings of church groups, punchbowl or onion tart evenings, film screenings, and the like.

Title of initiative: Social Village Café

OVERALL BUDGET: € 44,000

Public funds: € 9000 (Aktion Mensch, Caritas)

Private fund: € 35,000 (Ovenhausen Parish)

Duration: 2013 - 2014

2014

In the framework of a competition organised by the Archdiocese of Cologne, the "social village café" was awarded the "Pauline von Mallinckrodt Prize" in 2015. The jury recognised the conversion of the premises, the public relations work, and the success story of the "social village café" as a community meeting place. The competition was held under the motto "City - Country - Future".



Developing the village center



The so called **"New Village Centre"** located on the grounds of the parish was redesigned in a barrier-free manner to enable access by all residents, independent of age or disability. This is a 4500 square meter area encompassing the parish church, the parish hall, the rectory and the parish garden which is open to everyone.



Title of initiative: New Village Centre

OVERALL BUDGET: €69,500

Public funds: €19,500 (Federal State North Rhine-Westphalia), €5000 (City of Höxter), €5000 (local fund)

Private fund: €10,000 (competition price money), €25,000 (Archdiocese of Paderborn)

Construction with own labour (voluntary work)

Duration: 2016 - 2017

2017



The parish has also installed a powerful W-LAN for free use. Other highlights of the "New Village Centre" include a boules court, an outdoor bookcase, a chess and draughts board. Seating areas and an inter-generational meeting place were developed with a "trio of huts" consisting of two barrel and a barbecue hut in the parish garden.

Digital services In Ovenhausen



Exploring digital technologies: Based on the experiences gained with setting up and running the "social village café" in Ovenhausen, the local parish initiated the development of a project proposal in response to a rural development programme call under LEADER that was jointly run by the districts of Höxter and Lippe.

Title of initiative: Smart Country Side

OVERALL BUDGET: € 1.300.000

EU fund: € 673,000 for Ovenhausen (LEADER)

Other public funds (regional): € 420,900 from the Federal State of Northrhine-Westphalia

Private fund: € 52,533

Donations: € 153 600

Duration: 2016 - 2019

2019

Together with 26 other villages, Ovenhausen implemented a series of **public co-creation events to explore how digital technologies** can be used in different areas of daily life to improve the quality of life in the village.

The aim of the project was to explore the possibilities provided by digitalisation to foster future participation, voluntary work, neighbourhood help, services for the public and the interconnectivity in villages. In addition, **12 volunteers from Ovenhausen were trained** to pass on newly acquired digital skills to the local community free of charge, especially to teach basic skills of digitalisation to older people.

The digital village platform: As a result of the successful participation in the "Smart Country Side" light house programme, Ovenhausen successfully applied for a subsequent project under another regional programme relying on LEADER funds.

Together with 30 other villages in the county of Höxter, the people in Ovenhausen further explored the utilisation of digital technologies for their own purposes. A "digital learning corner" was set up in the village where the inhabitants were supported to get acquainted with digital technology. All inhabitants were supported in learning how to use digital technologies by the voluntary digital experts trained in the previous project. A village website was co-created by a software developer team and the villagers, interconnected with the newly developed "Village Broadcast" app. In the sense of a digital push service, the app enables every resident to distribute news, ask for support or offer used items throughout the local community.

Title of initiative: Dorf.Zukunft.Digital (Village.Future .Digital)

OVERALL BUDGET: € 235.331

EU funds: 65% (LEADER)

Other public funds: 35% (District)

Duration 2019-2022

2022



Title of initiative: Dorf.Gesundheit.Digital (Village.HealthCare.Digital)

OVERALL BUDGET: € 770.000

Other public funds: 90% national fund (Heimat 2.0, a funding programme for developing digital solutions in rural areas) & 10% district fund

Duration 2019-2022

Demonstration of digital health solutions: A barrier-free electronic health kiosk was set up in the social village café meeting place for the inhabitants to try and discuss opportunities and risks associated with digital solutions for the health and care domain. This initiative aims to showcase digital technologies in the field of health and nursing care. Demonstrated solutions include health analysis software, virtual reality glasses and a robot for nursing care.

Further developing digital services

Ovenhausen's vision is to further develop the village community centre into a place where training sessions to strengthen the digital skills of young and old, as well as physical and digital meetings of local associations, take place on a regular basis.



2025

A virtual calendar for all common rooms is to be put in place, including a co-working space enabling new forms of work. The use of common telecare solutions is to be explored to augment physical assistance to people in need of care.



In Focus: Harnessing digital technology for everyday life

Goal:

Like many other villages, Ovenhausen is affected by the general trend of an ageing population. Moreover, the village is in danger of losing its attractiveness as a place to live due to the **withdrawal of basic services from rural areas**. In addition to strengthening social interaction in the sense of a "caring community" through initiatives such as the "social village café", the general trend towards digitalisation is to be used to increase the quality of life in Ovenhausen. To this end, a two-pronged objective is being pursued. On the one hand, the **digital competence of the residents** is to be increased so that everybody can make meaningful use of a rapidly developing online world. It is assumed that developments such as online banking and online shopping have already changed the everyday lives of many people and will continue to do so in the future. On the other hand, digital technologies are also to be used **for creating digital services tailored** to the village.

Experience to date:

In the framework of the Smart Country Side initiative, 12 residents volunteered for a training programme qualifying them as **"village digital experts."** They pass on their knowledge free of charge to the residents and help individual citizens, especially the older generation, to find their way in the online world and to make purposeful use of digital media in everyday life.

Through a co-creation process, the residents' requirements were systematically fed into the **development of the digital village platform**, consisting of a village website and the interconnected "Village Broadcast" app. Meanwhile, 800 residents have registered on the app. The village website is edited by the volunteer digital experts. Legally, the village platform is run by the parish.

When exploring possibilities to utilise digital technology specifically for health care purposes, many residents turned out to be rather reluctant. There seems to be **uncertainty about the usefulness and trustworthiness of digital technologies** when it comes to personal health and care. The demonstration of several digital health care solutions and a health kiosk at the premises of the former vicarage enable the residents to get hands-on information about state-of-the-art digital health care solutions. As the renovated building also serves as a social meeting point, discussions about opportunities and risks potentially associated with digital health care are facilitated in a relaxed atmosphere.

Sine 2022, a commercial network operator is preparing to roll out a fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) telecommunications network in the district of Höxter. Information events were held in Ovenhausen and other villages in the region to draw attention to the possibilities of the new high-speed infrastructure.

"During the Corona pandemic, the village platform proved to be an important exchange channel for the residents. (...) But also during longer absences residents use the platform to keep in touch with their village, for instance young people studying at a distant place."

Hans-Werner Gorzolkia (district curator of local history and "village digital expert" from Ovenhausen)

Next steps:

In line with the jointly elaborated vision statement, the further utilisation of digital technologies is to be explored:

- Regular informational and educational events are to be offered to residents of all ages, thereby combining on-site events with virtual ones.
- Residents should be able to pick up digital shopping orders at a central point in the village.
- Each resident needs to have access to a state-of-the-art internet connection, enabling advanced online applications such as virtual visits in a 3D perspective.
- A virtual calendar of all common rooms is to be put in place, including a co-working space enabling new work arrangements.
- Church-related social media offerings are to be developed with the support of students.
- Physical support of activities of daily living are to be provided to those in need of care, augmented with suitable digital forms of support.



Local governance (public sector): Since Ovenhausen has become a district of the county capital Höxter, there are no elected leaders at the village level any more. For several years, the parish council has taken an active role in the self-organisation of local stakeholders to promote the development of the village. When it comes to acquiring and managing public funding for the village's own projects, this voluntary stakeholder group closely collaborates with the business development agency at county level, which actively promotes the participation of villages within the county in relevant programmes.

Local community (civil society): Ovenhausen's history in civil engagement traces back into the 1970s, when a national award for a successful village development was received by the local community. Currently, 12 local associations exist in the village. A group of about 10 volunteers representing the parish council, the local Caritas group and other associations form a core group that coordinates the various projects at village level. All stakeholders have committed to a jointly elaborated "vision statement".



Businesses: There are about 20 commercial businesses in Ovenhausen. Local craftsmen have supported the conversion of buildings through voluntary work, for example when setting up the social café. Many business owners in Oberhausen are also members of one of the local associations, and the associations are again an important channel to involve local residents in the various local projects.

Research (scientific sector): The co-development and technical implementation of the digital village platform was scientifically supported by Fraunhofer Institute for Experimental Software Engineering (IESE), a public research institute. Moreover, the Smart Country Side programme in which Ovenhausen had been involved with its own local project was scientifically evaluated on behalf of the county government. To this end, a contract was awarded to the University of Applied Science and Arts Westphalen-Lippe.

Community engagement process

When developing the village platform in the framework of the Smart Country Side programme, right from the beginning care was taken to **involve all residents in a co-creation process** by means of different participation formats such as village conferences and thematic workshops. In this context, a bottom-up decision making process was adopted giving power to the citizens when it comes to deciding what services should be implemented and what not. As the scientific evaluation was able to show, **the common discourse and the joint development of ideas** have strengthened social ties and the sense of belonging in the village. Due to the project approach, innovative ideas, e.g. when it comes to organising editorial support to the village platform, could be developed through the collaboration of actors of different ages and professions.

The success of the broad engagement process relies on a **strong commitment of a core group of volunteers** who are capable of setting up and managing such a processes over a longer duration. This places high demands on the voluntary steering group in terms of their planning and communication skills as well as their time availability. The availability of professional resources from the county's economic development agency has proved very helpful in this context, e.g. when it comes to applying for public funding and managing project funds.

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Further information:

Website of Ovenhausen: <https://www.ovenhausen-digital.de/>

Smart Rural 27 village profile of Ovenhausen: <https://www.smartrural27.eu/village/ovenhausen/>