

Report on  
European Stakeholder Platform  
meeting for  
National CAP Networks

7 February 2024, 9.30-12.45 CET

Online



Preparatory Action - Smart Rural Areas in the 21st Century - Contract No:  
AGRI-2020-0332

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## 1. Context

The **purpose** of the meeting was to present the *Smart Rural 21* and *Smart Rural 27* projects and the tools developed that CAP Networks can also use in their support activities; understand the state-of-play of CAP Network support for Smart Villages and jointly plan the relevant session of the Smart Rural 27 Final Conference (to be held on 18-19 March 2024 in Brussels – more information [here](#)). The main target group of this session was national CAP Networks representatives.

**27 participants from 18 Member States registered for the event** (see Figure 1), from which 18 were representatives of National CAP Networks and the 9 others were LEADER Association, Municipality, other NGOs and European institution representatives.

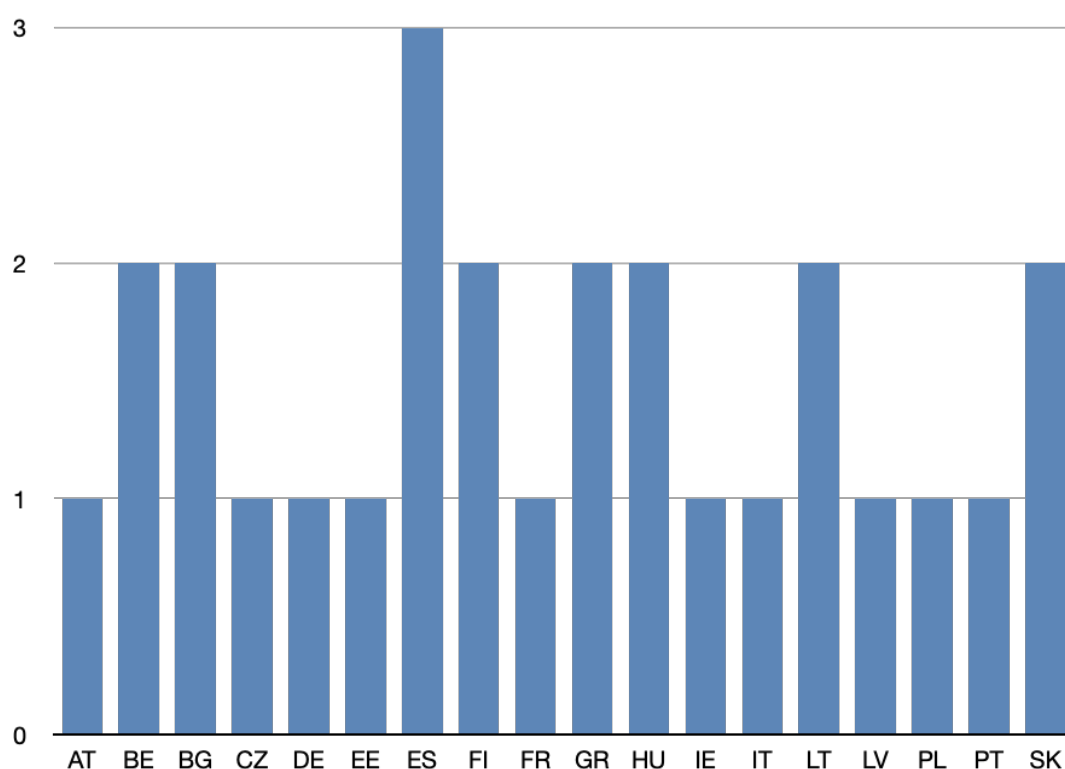


Figure 1, Participants by countries

## 2. Agenda

<i>Time</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>
9.30 - 10.00	<b>Presentation on the Smart Rural projects &amp; available support tools</b> , by <i>Edina Ocsko (E40, Smart Rural27 project Coordinator)</i>
10.00 - 10.45	Presentations by CAP Network representatives on their past and planned support activities on Smart Villages. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Michael Fischer, Smart Villages Networking - <b>The Austrian CAP Network</b></li><li>- Ann-Sofi Backgren - <b>The Finnish CAP Network</b></li><li>- <b>State of play of other National CAP networks activities on Smart Villages</b>, joint activity on Miro board</li></ul>
10.45 - 11.00	<b>Presentation on the planning of the Smart Rural 27 Final Conference (18-19/03/24, Brussels) &amp; specific workshops on CAP Network activities</b> , by <i>Edina Ocsko (E40, Smart Rural27 project Coordinator)</i>
11.00 - 12.30	<b>Joint discussion</b> on CAP Network Unit support needs, outline discussion paper and session for CAP Networks within the Final Conference
12.30 - 12.45	Concluding remarks & next steps

## 3. Outcomes

### 3.1. Presentation on the Smart Rural projects & available support tools, by *Edina Ocsko (E40, Smart Rural 27 project Coordinator)*

**Edina Ocsko** presented the *Smart Rural 21* and *Smart Rural 27* project outcomes and resources. Concerning *Smart Rural 21*, Edina explained the support provided for the implementation of Smart Village strategy development and implementation for rural communities across Europe. She noted that the project received over 730 applications from communities interested in the concept, demonstrating a significant level of interest. Edina also highlighted the **importance of a strategic approach**, which includes having a clear vision and local community impact. Additionally, she emphasised **the role of CAP networks in supporting smart villages, sharing information, building capacity, and influencing policy**. The importance of capacity building for two key groups - local action groups (LAGs) and rural communities – was highlighted. CAP Networks can play a role in creating a connection between Managing Authorities and LAGs and the **peer-to-peer exchanges and informal learning from other countries** has a specific added value. The focus can also be **on thematic areas** such as renewable energy or digital services. Edina concluded by encouraging CAP networks to start supporting the planning of the future CAP, that is already under way. In her presentation, Edina also provided **a detailed overview of CAP Network’s objectives and tasks according to the EU regulation**, and highlighted how Smart Villages could be supported within these.

In reflection to the presentation, Paweł Krzeczunowicz from the Polish Rural Network expressed his appreciation for the project's work, highlighting its practicality and accessibility.

### 3.2. Presentations by CAP Network representatives on their past and planned support activities on Smart Villages.

#### 3.2.1. Michael Fischer, Smart Villages Networking - The Austrian CAP Network

**Michael Fischer** started by introducing the context on how Smart Villages are supported in Austria through the CAP Strategic Plan and highlighted that there are 3 anchors with the **main focus on LEADER**, which is the main tool implementing Smart Villages because of the similarity to Smart Villages and previous experience. Local Action Groups are the main partners of the National CAP Network concerning Smart Villages approach. Michael highlighted that it is about the **local level**, but may not be restrained to one municipality, also it is important to stress the **integrated development** character of the approach. Local Action Groups see Smart Village approach as a **new way of engaging local level**. The second intervention in CAP SP is focusing on community center development and vacant building management and the third intervention supporting Smart Villages is Rural Innovation Systems which is similar to European Innovation partnerships. Michael shared the Austrian CAP Network's approach to supporting Smart Villages, outlining their focus on digital enhancement. He also discussed their plans to reactivate smart village initiatives, emphasising the importance of **communication and sharing good practices**. Michael Fischer discussed **the open innovation platform** aimed at supporting local communities in finding digital solutions. He also mentioned **plans for the Smart Village Lab**, which involves collecting challenges from villages and connecting them with innovators to find solutions.

#### 3.2.2. Ann-Sofi Backgren - The Finnish CAP Network

**Ann-Sofi Backgren** discussed her involvement in the Aurora programme and a project about smart ruralities, emphasising the importance of **entrepreneurship and culture** in retaining youth in rural areas. Ann-Sofi highlighted the potential of matching tools to **connect people in cities with empty houses in rural areas** and the need to promote well-being and safety at a local level. She mentioned the approval of several Smart Villages projects and the plan for extra media attention during the new period of implementation to Smart Villages projects. The discussion also revolved around the importance of collaboration and documentation in network activities, with Ann-Sofi suggesting that between Finland and Sweden, language is not a significant issue, but for wider exchanges, English or translation services could be used.

The Finnish Rural Network already carried out Smart Villages support activities in the past, including the **Smart Village competition, workshops and innovation camps**; as well as ran a Thematic Group on Smart Villages between 2019 and 2020. The Finnish Network is running **Smart Villages morning cafés** and webinars on topics such as youth engagement, digitalization and mobile services, international cooperation, culture, housing and wellbeing. The Network also **communicates about and promotes smart projects** through media widely.



Results of the Miro board showed that:

- Overall, while **past activities mostly included communication and awareness raising** on Smart Villages, as time passes **there is more emphasis on capacity-building and improving the implementation** of Smart Villages under the CAP.
- **Past activities** on communication and dissemination of good practices included Smart Villages competitions (e.g. in Poland and Finland), as well as various events (e.g. study visits in Czechia and Conference in Slovakia) and publications (e.g. Newsletter in Ireland). In terms of capacity-building and Smart Villages implementation under the CAP, understandably the activities were relatively limited in the past.
- **Ongoing actions** on communication and dissemination continue, with a focus on sharing good practices, including a series of interactive activities (such as smart cafés in Finland) and creation of databases with a Smart Villages dimension (e.g. in the context of LAGs in Poland); as well as capacity-building activities such as the Smart Rural Hub Laboratory in Italy. Some Smart Villages support activities have also been initiated in support of Smart Villages implementation, such as LEADER LAG support (Greece) and thematic group (Czechia).
- **Future planned actions** include further capacity-building (e.g. for LAGs in Greece, Flanders and Italy) and other capacity-building events (e.g. Smart Villages Lab in Austria); and in the context of improving CAP implementation, Smart Villages taskforce (Ireland) and meeting for supported projects (Finland).



## Past, ongoing and planned activities of CAP Networks identified through the Miro Board exercise

	Past activities	Ongoing actions	Planned actions	Ideas
Good practices, dissemination & communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Poland:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Funding of work by Network partner Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development (IRWiR PAN) to organise <b>three SV competitions</b> (333 applications in total) and publish research results on Polish approaches to SV „<b>The Smart Village concept – Examples from Poland</b>”</li> <li>▪ „Smart Villages as an effective way to address key challenges in rural areas – <b>international workshop</b> in Warsaw 21-22 October 2019</li> <li>▪ <b>Workshop on SV for LAG and regional government</b> representatives at a meeting of the LEADER Thematic Group of the Polish Rural Network</li> <li>▪ Participate in the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages (2017-2020) and in meetings of Smart Rural 21 and Smart Rural 27</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Czechia:</b> study visits</li> <li>● <b>Greece:</b> elaboration of <b>guidance for smart villages</b> concept &amp; implementation</li> <li>● <b>Ireland:</b> 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns <b>Annual Newsletters</b>' featuring local smart stakeholders</li> <li>● <b>Slovakia:</b> conference on Smart Villages</li> <li>● <b>Finland:</b> Smart Villages competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Finland:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Communication activities</b> (blogs posts, news paper articles, social media attention - social media influencer collaboration);</li> <li>▪ <b>Morning coffee hours</b> - Smart village morning coffee sessions for potential beneficiaries and funding agencies;</li> <li>▪ <b>Virtual project platform</b> (all projects funded from EAFRD) - "smart village" key word to search funded projects;</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Estonia:</b> Publication about smart village project in Estonia - supported by LEADER</li> <li>● <b>Poland:</b> Creation of the <b>new LAG database</b>, including information on SV</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Belgium</b> (Flanders): Disseminating information on SR21 and 27 and all the information of this workshop to the LAGs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Austria:</b> "interface" between AT project database and SR21/SR27 smart solutions.</li> </ul>
Capacity-building, networking, exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Czechia:</b> seminars, workshops</li> <li>● <b>Poland:</b> <b>On-line training</b> on the SV concept to Polish LAGs in anticipation of the CAP SP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Poland:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Planning a LAG launch event</b> in June 2024 (tbc) - there will be a number of workshops and SV is a possible topic;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Estonia:</b> Specific focus: Smart village tourism (providing food at events)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Austria:</b> showing the potential of digitalisation.</li> </ul>



	Past activities	Ongoing actions	Planned actions	Ideas
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation in the SR27 smart village platform in Poland</li> <li>• <b>Italy:</b> Smart Rural Hub Laboratory and capacity building activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Belgium (Flanders):</b> Workshop for LAGs on SV</li> <li>• <b>Austria:</b> Smart Village Lab</li> <li>• <b>Greece:</b> Training seminar for LAGs</li> <li>• <b>Italy:</b> Training for LAGs and local partnerships</li> </ul>	
Improving the implementation of the CAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Czechia:</b> thematic working group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Greece:</b> Guidance for implementation of small villages action e.g. state aid, support aids, elaboration of LAGs strategies;</li> <li>• <b>Czechia:</b> thematic working group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ireland:</b> Mini-taskforce (over 6 weeks) bringing together key smart stakeholders to discuss Irish Policy on Smart Villages</li> <li>• <b>Finland:</b> a meeting for SV projects funded in fall 2024</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Poland:</b> a review in 2025 of the status of implementation of SV in the CAP SP, to exchange experience in anticipation of the drafting of the next SPs post 2027.</li> </ul>

### 3.3. Discussion and presentation of the Smart Rural 27 Final Conference (18-19 March, Brussels)

The conversation continued with Edina Ocsko providing an **overview of the upcoming Final Conference of Smart Rural 27**, which will take place in Brussels on the 18th and 19th of March. The first day will focus on inspiring approaches from different communities, with presentations from lighthouse examples and discussions about Communities Knowledge Clusters. The second day will feature presentations on the outcomes of National Smart Villages Taskforces, with discussions on supporting SV through dedicated interventions and workshops on practical recommendations for improving the framework.

The **progress of the European Smart Villages Pilot Observatory was discussed**, with Michael Fischer **emphasising the need to maintain momentum**. Maria-Christina Makrandreou from the European Commission mentioned the importance of building up on both pilot project outcomes for future activities and networking. Salla Pätilä requested translated versions of materials. Paweł Krzeczunowicz asked **about the future of the European Smart Villages Observatory**, to which Edina clarified it was a pilot project and no information on future of similar activities is available at this stage. It was concluded that there is a need to focus on strategic plans implementation during the coming years and the need for better linkages with other EU programmes.

### 3.4. Conclusions

In the concluding remarks, Edina Ocsko (E40) thanked all the participants for their contributions and active participation. She highlighted the **importance of continued collaboration and information sharing among the participating countries to further support SV across Europe**. Edina encouraged those who haven't signed up for the final event to do so and expressed her willingness to provide any information needed from their end.