

Annex II: Meeting Reports

1st Smart Villages Taskforce Meeting – [LATVIA]

Purpose of the meeting

Building of a shared vision of the concept of smart territories. Identification of important stakeholders in the development of smart villages and identification of existing/necessary actions. Identifying the challenges/needs of rural communities and identifying potential digital solutions.

Date of the meeting

13 April 2023

Location

Customer Center of the Latvian State Forest Region, Jelgava district

Participation

In the first Taskforce meeting there were present 28 participants. The participants represented both the private and the public sector, from individuals to the various National organizations and Ministries. The participants who took part in the meeting were involved in the development and implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan for the development of Smart Villages at the regional and local level.

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

The purpose of the first Taskforce was to create a common understanding, knowledge and environment supporting Smart Villages, and work on which will be continued in future Taskforce meetings and actions.

As Smart Village concept is quite new and unknown and as there has been always a different understanding among those who knows of what Smart Village is – at the meeting we explained the concept of Smart Village. One of the most important tasks of the working group was to agree on a common understanding of the concept of Smart Villages.

Within the First Taskforce meeting we offered the definition (a definition which the participants generally did not object to) which is developed by the European Commission's Pilot Project on Smart Eco-social 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 mobilising solutions offered by digital technologies. 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 sources.

The mentioned definition will be used in the future, explaining and developing the concept of Smart Villages in Latvia.



During the meeting there were workshops where we mapped various potential stakeholders of Smart Villages and their existing and potential responsibilities. The workshop discovered a very broad field of work and a wide range of potential stakeholders. We see that it is very important to continue the explanatory work so that Smart Villages could promote sustainable rural development on its best possible way.

During the workshop, also we identified challenges of the local area and possible solutions – by delving more directly into digital solutions. We see that it is very important to provide a capacity building at local level, where it is needed or asked, including explaining and encouragement to create village strategies.

Within the framework of the workshops, the participants proposed that a National-level Smart Village strategy could be developed by The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (as the Ministry have previous activities in matters of public involvement).

Main outcomes/conclusions of the objectives of the taskforce:

- The development of smart villages requires nationally coordinated long-term actions;
- Strengthening the smart village networks and making the initiative more concrete;
- Building the link to the EU level smart village planning and implementation;
- Improving the information flow and knowledge exchange, including learning from other countries and international examples (sharing good practices and examples of smart solutions);
- The concept of smart villages is complex - the development of a unified concept of smart villages requires one specific platform that explains and provides practical steps on how to develop a Smart village in rural areas;
- LEADER LAGs may support Smart Village projects and in fact LEADER funding is the only targeted funding for the development of Smart Villages;
- Discussion participants had different opinions - whether the sustainable development of Latvia's countryside requires a coordinated and managed Smart Villages concept on a national scale, or whether it should remain a local initiative without certain restrictive conditions.

Next steps

2nd Smart Villages Taskforce Meeting on 15 June 2023.

Supporting documents

-

The event in pictures



