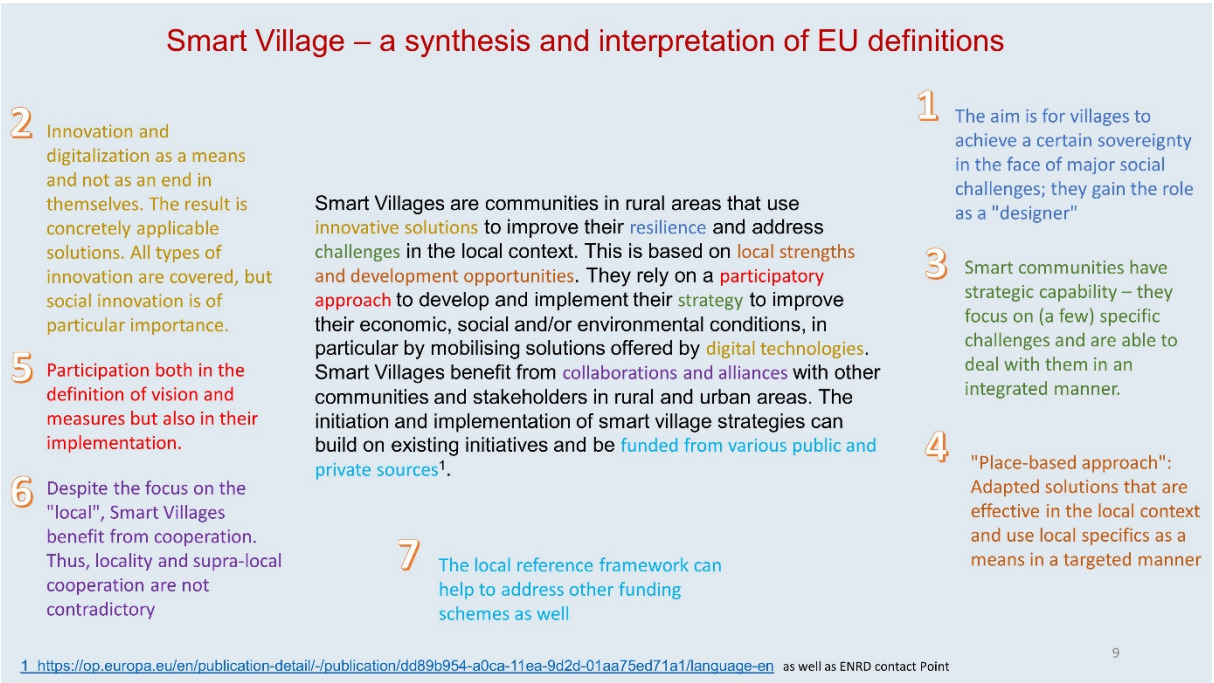
This document has been prepared under the Preparatory Action on Smart Rural Areas in the 21st Century - Bis (Smart Rural 27 project) funded by the European Commission by using visual material (maps) of Amt Der Steiermark Landesregierung. Maps © Amt Der Steiermark Landesregierung.

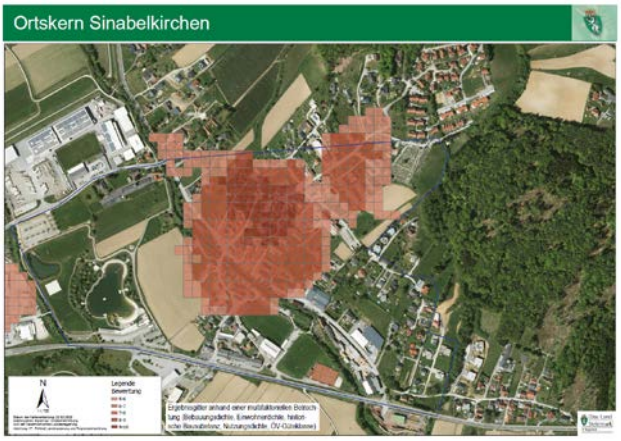
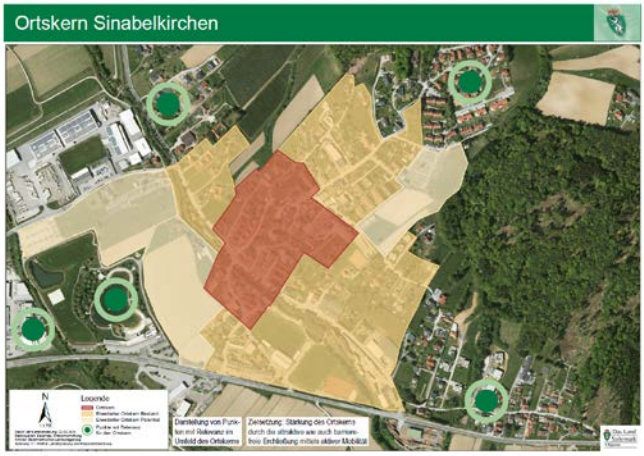
Municipal and town center development in Styria – The „5-step-approach" as a multi-level governance framework for Smart Villages

Rationale: As part of the "Strong Centers in Styria" initiative, the Province of Styria provides incentives for the further development of municipal and town centers. Of particular importance is to put existing buildings back to sustainable use, to reduce vacancy, to make the public space climate-friendly and thus to maintain quality of life for all generations.

The Styrian approach on *smart* village center development acts as a pilot within the AT Smart Village taskforce to showcase how the Smart Village concept can be applied for a special development topic. It needs to be pointed out that this is a multi-level approach, involving local, regional (LAG/ Regionalmanagement) as well as federal province and national level.

To make the connection to the EU concept easier, there will be references to the various Smart Village criteria, following this systematic:



1. Spatial delimitation of the center	Smart Solution
In the beginning the „center“ needs to be defined. Therefore, the village or town center is delimited based on comprehensible criteria with the support of the province of Styria. A lively center should be created where there is already a high mix of uses, and availability of historical as well as sufficient building fabric. It is an area where many people live and spend time in everyday life. Sustainable and active mobility in the form of suitable public transport connections as well as attractive walking and cycling paths are available and the zoning also allows for inward development (further developing the inner zone). 2 This step shows how digital solutions can help building a basis for a development process or evidence-based decision making. In this case the digital solution is provided by the federal province and used in cooperation with the villages. 4 This analysis also unveils local development potential which is clearly place based since this analysis is unique for every municipality.	The map of the municipality is overlayed with a raster of 20x20m cells. For each cell it is counted: historical buildings, buildings in total, number of different usages, number of inhabitants, land use designation-spatial planning and public transport quality class. According to a weighing of each of these characteristics each cell gets a value.  This raster model is further refined and - after on-site consultation - results in a designation of individual parcels of land to the categories “municipal center”, “enhanced municipal center (existing)” “enhanced municipal center (potential)” and “points of relevance for the center” (areas outside the enhanced center). Contents of the enacted local development concept are taken into account. 
2. Setting framework conditions for a strong center	**Smart Solution**
Existing regional and local spatial concepts, guiding principles as well as strategies for the center are compiled and filtered regarding their relevance for	The approach here is to build up on existing analysis in the first place and just adding new ones if necessary. This also values past participation processes which – in the case of Styrian municipalities – were quite

the defined town or city center. This enables actors to derive clear needs, potentials and challenges for a strong center. 3 Following a strategic approach does not necessarily mean to re-invent the wheel. It can often be more fruitful to use existing material, combine it and use it as a strategic basis	frequently implemented in the past years, mainly via Local Agenda 21. The Styrian administration (specifically the village center coordinator) supports municipalities in screening these documents and helps with focussing.
3. Defining a vision for the center	Smart Solution
Local politics and administration together with committed homeowners, businesses, associations and interested members of the public, develop a comprehensible and easily communicable vision imaging the future for the village or town center, which serves as a new basis for decision-making. 5 Participation plays a crucial role in village center development since a variety of different interests need to be aligned. In this step, it is about making different perspectives for the future use of the village center visible. 6 Smart Villages are not local "containers". There are existing dependencies and functional connections with surrounding areas and the different vertical levels of governance (e.g. politics, administration, etc.). Styria supports the mutual exchange by providing a "village center coordinator" who connects the dots.	One of the main challenges in center development is to overcome the narrow focus of one "problematic" built object or area (e.g. a former industry building that is not in use) but instead drawing a "bigger picture" including the whole center and its surrounding spaces, societal developments, inhabitant´s needs etc. Therefor a new quality for visioning processes is needed. At that point it deems important to have properly trained process experts who support the municipalities. Their task is to ensure the right framing (especially managing expectations), to attract the right mix of people and facilitate the process in a way that it results in a shared vision with common responsibilities instead of a "wish list". LEADER LAGs and Regionalmanagements can support these processes with their experiences and connect them to the wider regional development perspectives. That enhances integrated development. Past experiences taught that visioning processes which just remain within the "local bubble" often are not practicable when it comes to implementation. The reason is that the local level often depends on funding by regional authorities, are bound to regional and national laws, etc. and if it becomes apparent in an advanced stage that projects are not in line with these it is difficult to react. Hence these visions need a "reality check" already in an early stage in terms of a communication node between the local level and the regional authorities. As part of their smart governance approach the Styrian administration provides a feed back on these visions and their estimation of odds and possible obstacles for realizing the vision.
4. Developing a strategy	Smart Solution
A tailor-made development strategy for the village or town center is drawn up on the basis of the vision.	For this purpose, coordinated short-, medium- and long-term individual projects are defined and the development strategy is defined as a continuous process. For the realization and flexible adaptation of the development strategy structures in the

3 Smart strategies are integrated strategies. In the context of village center development this means taking a broader perspective instead of just focussing on one "problematic" object. Undoubtedly individual objects might be the starting point and for some stakeholders the initial motivation for action but during the strategy process the connection to various other aspects of "center" need to be drawn. 1 Many village centers faced a "downward spiral" during the last decade. Municipalities in many cases were not able to find a suitable solution to break out of this dynamic. This new integrated approach together with a supportive governance structure should help gaining sovereignty again.	municipality are established and qualified, and continuous communication accompanies the process.
5. Implementing projects along three axes	
Active positioning of municipal functions in the center In strengthening of towns and city centers, the focus lies on the preservation or reinstallation of municipal functions in the center, like healthcare, childcare, libraries, local food supply, education. etc. These measures concentrate visitor frequency in the center show consistency in implementation and are important as a stimulus for private investment in an attractive environment. **Adapting public space for a climate-friendly environment** Strong centers thrive on the efficient division and use of public space, which can be through user-oriented furnishings, shady planting and accessible green spaces. Thus existing open spaces are transformed into multifunctional and and climate change-adapted everyday spaces with a high quality of stay.	Each of these three axes provide potential for local smart solutions and help keeping track towards sustainable development. Active positioning of municipal functions is an important approach to enhance dynamic in the center which in turn should lead to followers that want to make use of the frequency which creates an upward dynamic. The climate aspect is important especially for climate change mitigation. The utilisation of existing stock/buildings as well as redensifying should prevent soil sealing and is in that sense an important action against climate change and preserving biodiversity. Responsibilities for topics in the context of center development are split up between different departments in the regional administration. To ensure a sound communication between the village level and the administration, the department for regional development supports villages coordinating horizontally between these respective departments. This does not only cover approving processes but also providing access to different funding opportunities for the villages (e.g. ERDF as well as regional and national funds)

Utilize existing stock and redensify Active land management with a special focus on existing vacancies, moderate redensification and an attractive mix of space-related uses will make the town or city center a diverse living environment for residents. This requires cooperation between politicians, administrators, homeowners, entrepreneurs, business owners, associations and the active population. 6 On project level actors can also benefit from experiences of other municipalities. Therefor good practice transfer is foreseen to support making use of existing "smart solutions". LAGs and Regionalmanagements play an important role in knowledge-transfer. 7 The Styrian approach connects national/provincial funding with EU instruments. LEADER LAGs and the CAP interventions on village center development and vacancy management are coupled with provincial fundings for public infrastructure. For larger towns it is in consideration to make ERDF accessible. One success factor for realizing this is the vertical coordination on provincial level by the department for regional development and the village center coordinator.	

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