

The Smart Village Network was launched on 5 April 2018



The Smart Village Network is an independent network of open-minded villages and village associations. The work of the network is supported and promoted through a dedicated website (www.smart-village-network.eu).

The Smart Village Network is open to all villages and village associations and includes a set of pioneering villages and village associations as members (see www.smart-village-network.eu/the-network).

The Smart Village Network aims at supporting the **exchange of experiences among villages** about (potential) smart solutions in response to rural challenges and opportunities.

It also aims to **make the voices of villages heard** at the regional, national and European levels. It is a platform to discuss and debate various issues and share ideas related to 'smart villages' and future rural development policy (see our blog article on ['Villages need to have a say in what smart villages are'](#)¹).

The Smart Village Network provides a bottom-up perspective on the 'smart village' concept and in this way aims to complement EU-level actions.

Follow us on Twitter: Smart Village Network @smartvillagenet

I'm an interested village or village association. How can I join?

The Smart Village Network is open to any villages or associations representing villages. You don't need to be 'smart' to join the network. It is sufficient if you are open to exchange and sharing your experience, and interested in the 'smart village' theme. If you would like to become a member, please contact us at info@smart-village-network.eu.

I'm an interested stakeholder or stakeholder organisation. How can I join?

Currently, the Smart Village Network includes villages and village associations as members. However, you may be an interested stakeholder (individual, researcher, research or university organisation, consultancy, policy-maker, etc.) who would like to follow the work of the network and get involved in the discussion about 'smart villages'.

We are planning to promote a community of practice of interested stakeholders. If you are interested in being informed about our activities and any future developments, or you would like to tell your ideas, please contact us at info@smart-village-network.eu.

What's hot?

A 'Pilot project on smart eco-social villages' has been launched by the European Commission and implementation started in December 2017. One of the aims of the Pilot Project is to find and establish a definition for "Smart Villages". For this purpose a first consultation was opened until 27 April 2018. A working definition will then be proposed and published for a second consultation in May 2018.



A blog article was published on the Smart Village Network website, arguing that **we need a definition that allows all villages to be(come) smart**. In the article, E40 Group argues that any village can become 'smart'. By defining the exact nature of 'smartness' (e.g. linked to a certain level of digital, economic or environmental development), there is a risk that a number of villages - that otherwise have innovative and relevant solutions to modern rural challenges - will be excluded from the 'smart village' concept. Therefore, **an operational definition of 'smart villages'** is required that is focused on the process of becoming a smart village rather than on the specific village characteristics.

Read the full article here: www.smart-village-network.eu/blog-1/we-need-a-definition-that-allows-all-villages-to-be-come-smart



Village Perspective: What members think...

The Smart Village Network kicked off with a set of pioneering villages and village associations as members, including, the Finnish Village Movement Association; Schickelsheim, Königslutter and Landkreis Helmstedt (Germany); Koppány-valley Naturpark (Hungary), Ptuj (Slovenia); Lormes (France), National Association of Virtuous Municipalities (Italy), La Noguera Medinaceli (Spain), Arctic Smart Rural Communities (Finland) and Ludgate Hub/Skibbereen (Ireland).

You can find out more about SVN members here: www.smart-village-network.eu/the-network

² www.pilotproject-smartvillages.eu/

³ www.smart-village-network.eu/blog-1/we-need-a-definition-that-allows-all-villages-to-be-come-smart

Here are the perspectives of representatives of two of the SVN member organisations on why they joined the network, and how the network could support their work, and complement on-going activities:



Petri Rinne,
Village Movement Association
(Finland)



Kaspar Haller,
Schickelsheim (Germany)

Why did your village or village association join the Smart Village Network?

Petri:

Finland is the most sparsely populated country in the EU but we have a big number of rural villages, more than 4000 all together. The Finnish Village Movement as a national-level umbrella NGO is, among others, very interested in identifying and spreading the good practices related to smart service provision, digitalisation and youth inclusion, that very much define the future of rural communities in our country.

Kaspar:

Our small village has a long history and we feel it is yet again time for it to evolve to secure its sustainable future from the 21st century onwards. We have ideas but so do others. Joining the Smart Village Network is a chance for us to get into contact with those people who face similar challenges and have equal drive to take them on and form the future. We are looking for exchange of ideas, inspiration, knowledge, solutions and a network that makes villages across Europe stronger.

How could the Smart Village Network best support your work?

Petri:

Both the village development and advocacy functions are important. It would be important that the village level activists themselves take part in these exchanges, both electronically and face-to-face.

Kaspar:

We believe that together we will be more efficient and effective as we exchange ‘how-tos’, unite our networks and navigate our way through national and European-level opportunities and red tape.

What actions are taking place at the regional/ national level on ‘smart villages’ and how could the Smart Village Network’s work complement these?

Petri:

In good cooperation with the Finnish National Rural Network and other rural partner organisations we arrange a Smart Village contest in Finland this year. Voluntary and interested villages will boost their smartness in this development process. SVN could provide some international level sparring to this process and later we could extend the contest at the European level!

Kaspar:

There are few effective local actions; mostly its disillusionment. At a European level the leverage is greater but actions are even less targeted. We hope SVN will offer transparency and a way to connect for those willing to (use modern technology to) revive our beautiful European countryside.

We are just animators. The Network is *you*, the members...

The Smart Village Network is supported by a group of independent organisations with extensive experience in rural development policy, research and networking. This initiative is not part of any EU-funded programmes, the four partners are working on the network animation and support out of their enthusiasm for this topic, on a voluntary basis.

“We are just animators, the real energy and enthusiasm is coming from member villages and village associations. They are the Network.”

“At **E40 Group** we believe in the power of bottom-up initiatives. We also believe that networking can help bring EU policies closer to local people. We have extensively worked in both rural development and rural networking, and we experienced how well structured exchanges and inspiring new methods can lead to new relations, knowledge, mutual exchange and learning.



We are enthusiastic about animating the Smart Village Network initiative. We would like to bring our knowledge and experience in network-support and rural development to the Smart Village Network. Our partnership with Wageningen Economic Research (the Netherlands), Ljubljana University (Slovenia) and eTownz (Ireland) will bring complementary skills as well as a wide geographical coverage in support of this network.

However, we are just animators. The main drivers of the network are the villages and village associations behind it. Their enthusiasm and contributions will fill with meaning and contents our future activities.”

Find out more about us: www.e40.eu.

“**Wageningen Economic Research** is already fortunate to coordinate projects on smart agriculture and farming. However, we believe that rural development requires the engagement not only of farmers, but all rural citizens. We are particularly interested to see how digital technology can provide added value also outside of farming, such as in basic services (like energy production, social and health care, mobility). Wageningen has also worked on the theme of ‘feeding large metropolitan areas’. We believe that if rural areas found ‘smart solutions’ to overcome their challenges, this would not only help them to retain or attract new people, but also to counterbalance outmigration from rural to urban areas and reduce the pressure of feeding mega-cities.



We are happy to be involved in supporting the Smart Village Network. In particular, we can help create linkages between on-the-ground practice and research through helping to conceptualise concepts and complex relationships related to smart villages and urban-rural linkages and create communication channels between (future) smart villages and research stakeholders.”

“Rural areas have been an important topic of interest for the **University of Ljubljana** for a long time. This is especially true for the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, which is representing the University of Ljubljana in the Smart Village Network.



We are strongly convinced that digitalisation is a key factor in helping rural areas in Europe develop and sustain their economies and communities. That is the reason why we have participated in many national and European projects and together with partners have developed a series of resources, tools and strategies to enable high speed broadband networks to be developed at efficient cost, translating best practices into effective and efficient policies to help all of rural Europe be better connected.

Together with partners from the Alpine region, we already started some activities of building a network of Smart Villages in 2017, however, as we strongly believe that this concept is beneficial for villages all around Europe, we were very happy to learn about and support the European Smart Village Network initiated by E40 Group. Within the network we would like to share our experience and lessons learnt mainly in the different topics of digitalization and digital transformation, and co-creation and open innovation processes with stakeholders.”

“**eTownz** is an Irish company that specialises in developing digital tools for projects in community and international development. In the past five years, eTownz has undertaken extensive research with various institutions to develop user-friendly digital tools to empower communities. We are passionate about the role that digital technologies can play in the community development sector.



eTownz will contribute to the Smart Village Network through developing the Village Data Platform together with the other partners. We are particularly happy to contribute through our experience in web development and data visualisation.

What's next?

There are a number of future developments and actions planned in relation to the Smart Village Network:

- ✓ Our members and animators will continue to contribute to the **Smart Village Network blog** (www.smart-village-network.eu/blog-1) with new ideas and concepts. Follow the blog, comment and share our articles!
- ✓ The website will soon host an **online Village Data Platform** (www.smart-village-network.eu/smart-villages-data-platform): a database of villages that have developed, are in the process of developing or interested in finding out about smart village strategies.
- ✓ A tool will be created for our members to upload their information in the database. Interested stakeholders will be able to identify villages and search for smart solutions that are most suitable for their specific contexts based on specific search criteria (including country, basic village characteristics and data, local assets and thematic area of smart solutions).
- ✓ We are already on **Twitter** (Smart Village Network @smartvillagenet), and will soon be present on **other social media** (such as Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Follow us, share and contribute!
- ✓ We are continuously **extending our membership** (see information on the first page on how to get involved) and we will continue exchanging ideas and experience at local, national and EU levels.

This bottom-up network is gaining its energy from its stakeholders. We would welcome new villages and village associations in our network. Please also get in touch with us if you are an interested stakeholder (at info@smart-village-network.eu).