

ACTION GROUP 5



*To connect people electronically and promote
accessibility to public services*

WORK IN PROGRES

Financial Support mechanisms for Smart Villages and Smart Regions

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March 2021

1. Background

The Board of action group Leaders (BAGL) and the Executive Board (EB) of EUSALP chose the “Smart village” topic as one of five cross-sectoral topics within the project ALPGOV II. The larger background to this topic described in the *concept note* of the cross-sectoral initiative “Smart Village”. According to the concept note, the first activity is to **“Establish an overview of existing financial support mechanisms for Smart Villages and Smart regions in the Alpine area.”** For Stakeholders it is sometimes difficult to identify the right support mechanisms. In some territories, new support mechanisms are under evaluation and some support mechanisms could be better streamlined. The goals of this activity are therefore to

- create an overview of existing financial support mechanisms in order to facilitate the orientation for potential beneficiaries;
- help public authorities in developing new financial mechanisms or to improve existing ones;
- identify the potentials for streamlining financial support mechanisms.

The following report and overview is based on a desk research and a survey within the Actions Groups involved in the cross-sectoral initiative “Smart villages” and the members of the Alpine Think Tank on Services of General Interest. The report presents the actual state of play depending on the replies received and is therefore considered as “work in progress”, which can be completed as soon as further information are available.

2. Definition and delimitation of Smart Villages in the EUSALP-framework

According to the EU Action Plan, Smart Villages are *“rural areas and communities which build on their existing strengths and assets as well as on developing new opportunities”*, where *“traditional and new services are enhanced by means of digital, telecommunication technologies, innovations and better use of knowledge”*. The Smart Village concept in the EUSALP framework takes up this definition. At the same time, it always relies on a participatory approach, including the stakeholders within the communities. This allows the elaborated strategy for the use of digital solutions to be adapted to the needs and the different frame conditions in the various alpine communities or regions. An integrated participatory process will enhance the acceptance and therefore also the adoption of the new “smart” solutions.

Only regions / municipalities which have undergone such a participatory and holistic approach to the topic of Smart villages will be considered in the scope of this analysis. The Smart villages approach is considered as a model for regional development and not purely as a technological solution.

3. Financial support mechanisms on different political and territorial levels

3.1 European Level

At EU-level, different instruments and policies help to develop and support the Smart villages approach. The chart below gives an overview and shows the linkages between the different measures. Most of them are the further detailed in the text.

EU-wide collective effort					National regional and local			Financial instrument
Horizon Europe	Digital Europe	CEF	Creative Europe	Health	Cohesion	Agriculture Funds	RRF	InvestEU
Research Innovation	Strategic capacities: computing, data, testbeds etc. Advanced digital skills EU-Wide deployment	Broadband and 5G roll out Connecting Communities	Creative industry Media	Telemedicine eHDSI	Digital connectivity in white and grey areas Support to enterprises in line with Smart specialisation Digital skills for all citizens	Making use of Big Data for CAP monitoring Broadband rollout in rural areas	Connect Scale-up Modernise Reskill and Upskill 20% digital	Leverage private capital for investments in SMEs, research, digital, infrastructure, skills...



Source: Slide presented by DG Connect at the Week of Macroregional Strategies (online), 2nd March 2021.

Cohesion policy 2021 – 2027

The Commission's proposal for the Cohesion policy in 2021 – 27 foresees several Policy Objectives, which are relevant for the Smart villages approach:

- **Policy Objective 1: A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation.** Specific objectives: (2) Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies and governments, (3) enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs and (4) developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship.
- **Policy Objective 3: A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity.** Specific objectives: (1) Enhancing digital connectivity and (3) Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility. As well as (4) Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility.
- **Policy Objective 4: A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.** Specific objectives: (2) Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and life long learning through developing infrastructure. (3) Increasing the socioeconomic integration of marginalized communities, migrants and disadvantaged groups, through integrated measures including housing and social services. (4) Ensuring equal access to health care through developing infrastructure, including primary care.

- **Policy Objective 5: Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives.** Specific objectives: (2) Fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental local development, cultural heritage and security including for rural and coastal areas also through community-lead local development.

INTERREG Programs

Interreg is one of the key instruments of the European Union (EU) supporting cooperation across borders through project funding. Its aim is to jointly tackle common challenges and find shared solutions in fields such as health, environment, research, education, transport, sustainable energy and more. Different INTERREG-Programs on different territorial levels can be helpful to finance the installation and promotion of new approaches to support smart villages and to start the corporation of new partners in this topic. Depending on their character, INTERREG programs can also help to finance the implementation of measures to a larger extent

Leader / CLLD

The local development method that is implemented under the national and regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) of each EU Member State, co-financed from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The method is based on local actors (Local Action Groups LAG) in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, the LEADER method has been extended under the broader term **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)** to three additional EU Funds, of which two are of importance for the Smart Village approach in the Alpine Area: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

The smart village approach is closely aligned with LEADER / CLLD programmes, especially the participatory character. When Smart Villages initiatives are identified by local people as a priority in their Local Development Strategy (LDS) and the right regulatory framework is in place, LEADER / CLLD can be a powerful tool for initiating and facilitating a process for implementing a Smart Villages approach. The actions that LAGs can carry out includes mobilizing local people, facilitating conversations on challenges and opportunities, supporting technical studies and pilot projects, and financing small-scale investments. This can create the conditions for larger investments from the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), Cohesion Funds or from national public and private sources. Even when Smart Villages initiatives are more advanced, LEADER can continue to play an important role in helping to consolidate and extend activities.

However, there are some constraints to the use of LEADER for Smart Village Strategies: The functioning depends a lot of the LAG, how active they are how much they are linked with the stakeholder groups and emerging citizen ideas. Increasing complexity and administrative burden including controls and sanctions. Pressure to spend on measurable short-term economic results. A priority focus, can inhibit initiatives that do not meet this focus.

Using the EAFRD, ERDF or ESF through LEADER / CLLD and via the LAG is one of the most important tools for the smart village initiatives, especially in the starting phase.

Non-LEADER financing within CAP

Although Member States are encouraged by the European Commission to support Smart Villages, there are no specific interventions for Smart Villages included in the suggested post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Member States will thereby be given the flexibility to design their own national / regional support for Smart Villages

The basic rules of 2014-2020 EU Rural Development funding for cooperation are very open, but there should be at least two entities cooperating, the funding should mainly support the act of cooperating and the activity should be new (not already ongoing).

The financing can go towards: 1. Networks – the creation of new networks (together with the commencement of new network activities); 2. EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) – Operational Groups are a very specific form of cooperation projects 3. Other Cooperation Groups – support is also available for other forms of groupings and joint activities that are less experimental in nature than EIP-AGRI Operational Groups.

Types of activities that are supported:

- Non-LEADER local development strategies.
This type of cooperation activity is intended to support public-private partnerships with a more specific and focused development objective than a LAG.
- Climate change and the environment.
Potentially very relevant for Smart Villages aiming to address environmental challenges, efficient water management, the use of renewable energy, the preservation of agricultural landscapes etc.
- Short supply chains and local markets.
This is a popular cooperation activity that can be closely linked with a range of community development initiatives. Corona crisis might have enhanced the interest in using smart technologies in order to shorten the supply chains.
- Miscellaneous cooperation between small operators.
This is intended to foster cooperation between micro-enterprises in rural areas to help them find economies of scale together. It was mainly oriented towards the touristic sector, but could potentially also be used for Smart Village approaches.
- Pilot projects
- Diversification of farming into social functions
- Forest management plans

However, the implementation depends on the national Rural Development Plans.

Besides the Rural Development Fund, the Regional Development Funds can support the implementation of smart village or smart region initiatives, especially in the field of Basic Services and village Renewal (M 7). Regional Operational Programmes financed under other ESI Funds (for example ERDF or ESF) can also provide support for Smart Villages

Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europa and other Research Programs

Research Projects have the main goal to gather new knowledge on a scientific level. However, some projects (e.g. Projects within Horizon 2020 like SIMRA or DESIRA) can sometimes have a budget for “implementation initiatives”, “living labs”, “innovation actions” or similar. If an initiative is adapted to the research frame, this can be used to start or dynamize a smart village strategy, to organize participatory workshops and to implement first actions.

Digital Europe

As part of the next long-term EU budget – the Multiannual Financial Framework – the Commission has proposed Digital Europe, a programme focused on building the strategic digital capacities of the EU and on facilitating the wide deployment of digital technologies. With a planned overall budget of €7.5 billion (in current prices), it will shape and support the digital transformation of Europe's society and economy.

The programme will boost investments in supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced digital skills, and ensuring a wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society, including through Digital Innovation Hubs. Its goal is to improve Europe's competitiveness in the global digital economy and achieve technological sovereignty. It will do so by deploying and capacity-building new digital technologies, in order to support digital transformation that will guarantee high quality public services benefiting citizens and businesses.

Digital Europe will complement other EU programmes, such as the Horizon Europe programme for research and innovation, as well as the Connecting Europe Facility for digital infrastructure. Adoption of the Programme and launch of the first calls are planned for the first quarter of 2021.

For more information: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/europe-investing-digital-digital-europe-programme>

Connecting Europe Facility CEF

The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) in Telecom is a key EU instrument to **facilitate cross-border interaction between public administrations, businesses and citizens**, by deploying digital service infrastructures (DSIs) and broadband networks. Supported projects will contribute to the creation of a European ecosystem of interoperable and interconnected digital services that sustain the [Digital Single Market](#).

For the 2021-2027 period the Commission proposed a budget of 3 billion euros, mostly focused on connectivity aspects, still subject to an agreement on the overall long-term EU budget.

Supported projects contribute to:

- Improvements in the competitiveness of the European economy;
- Promotion of the interconnection and interoperability of national, regional and local networks;
- Access to such networks, thus supporting the development of a Digital Single Market.

More information: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/connecting-europe-facility-telecom>

Preparatory Action on Smart local administration using IoT, AI, VR and Machine Learning tools to get closer and more present to the citizen (Smart local administrations)

On 19 February 2020, the European Commission presented its digital strategy which aims at making Europe more fit for the digital age. In order to promote wider uptake and use of advanced digital technologies such as AI and data, the European Commission has proposed the Digital Europe Programme 2021-2027 (DEP). The programme will reinforce Europe's capacities in key digital technology areas through large scale deployment and widen their diffusion and uptake to ensure that also the public sector and areas of public interests, such

as administrations, health and care, education, judiciary, transport, energy, environment, cultural and creative sectors, can deploy and access state-of-the-art digital technologies

The objective of this preparatory action is to support the development and roll-out of digitally enabled innovative solutions for citizen engagement in policy making and decision making, as well as co-creation and co-delivery of public services at the local level. The digital technologies to be employed should be based on solutions available on the market, using innovative technological trends such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI) including Machine Learning, and Virtual Reality (VR).

The Consortium for the preparatory action needs to include at least 5 (five) legal entities from at least 3 (three) eligible countries. The deadline for Application is the 10th of September 2020.

Recovery and Resilience Facility

The Recovery and Resilience Facility RRF will make €672.5 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by Member States. The aim is to mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

Member States will prepare recovery and resilience plans that set out a coherent package of reforms and public investment projects. To benefit from the support of the Facility, these reforms and investments should be implemented by 2026. A minimum of 20% of expenditures has to be invested on digital transformation. So this is a powerful instrument to help develop also the Smart villages approach, which strengthens the resilience of rural areas as proven during the Covid-19-crisis.

For more information: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en

3.2 National, Regional and Municipal level (general)

National level

All countries have their national development programs and rural development programs that are one of the major sources of financing for Smart Village Initiatives. Countries might also have programs that finance initiatives in innovation, digitalization, climate protection (green smart initiatives) etc.. Depending on the character of the initiative, these programs could help to finance the elaboration or the implementation of an initiative.

Regional Level

In many countries, the regions/departments have a very important role when it comes to the implementation of regional development strategies. They also have a big decision power when it comes to the relocation of funds in some sectors, like for example education, health, or transport systems. These are all sectors that could be addressed in Smart Village initiative, with high potential for digital solutions. Therefore, when a Smart-Village or Smart Region initiative is located these thematic fields, the regions can have a very important role. In some cases, they may also support pilot initiatives and projects involving one or several municipalities in order to test the implementation on the whole territory.

Municipal Level

In the Smart village initiatives, municipalities and groups of municipalities are very important

actors. Within the municipalities or regions, there is also a big potential for material or financial support from other actors. Municipalities support the initiatives on one hand by offering man power and infrastructure, on the other hand by relocating funds of the municipal budget for the implementation of the measures. They can also support the elaboration of the initiatives financially. On the municipal level, sponsorships or partnerships with companies or foundations can be another interesting financing tool. Privates can offer material of financial support and volunteers can offer their manpower and knowledge.

3.3. Funding opportunities specific to countries or regions

3.3.1 Italy

National level:

Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)

As part of the regional cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 cycle, particular attention - as a tool for the development of the entire country - was paid to the so-called "Internal Areas". Part of the Italian territory (about sixty percent of the national territory) is characterized by the presence of small municipalities, far from essential services - such as schools, health care and mobility - and the marginalization of these areas therefore assumes "national" importance; the guideline document for regional policy planning "Methods and Objectives for the Effective Use of Community Funds 2014-2020", in fact recognized that the development of the entire country also depends on the development of its internal areas.

Since September 2012, the Minister for Cohesion has started the construction of a national strategy for the development of "Internal Areas" with the support of an *Internal Areas Technical Committee* set up for the purpose and after a phase of dialogue with the representatives of the various Regions, the document relating to the National Strategy of Internal Areas has been drawn up, a document which has merged into the Partnership Agreement. In fact, the Internal Areas constitute one of the key territorial dimensions of the 2014-2020 regional policy and will be part of the key elements in the upcoming 2021-27 period as well.

The strategy has the dual objective of adapting the quantity and quality of education, health, mobility (citizenship) services and promoting development projects that enhance the natural heritage and cultural heritage of these areas, also focusing on local production chains (market). The strategy already foresees the activation of a participatory process (co-design) with the local population in order to identify the key objectives and aspects on which the project will focus on.

More information available at: <https://www.agenziacoessione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/>

Fondo Comuni Confinanti (FCC)

The Fund allocates to border territories projects, 80 million euros per year, coming, in equal parts, from the budgets of the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano. The priority objectives of the Neighboring Municipalities The fund finances different types of interventions (infrastructures, local development, personal services, territorial marketing, aid to businesses, etc.) identified in the context of development proposals of a provincial nature.

With the new management, not only projects proposed by neighboring and contiguous municipalities are financed, but also strategic projects (for example concerning the Stelvio or the Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage), wanted by Lombardy, Veneto, Bolzano and Trento, or other projects of bilateral interest of these Bodies.

Of the total 80 million per year, 24 are destined for projects presented by the Municipalities on a tender issued annually by the fund, 56 are agreed between the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces on strategic projects, having in any case the territories of the neighboring and contiguous municipalities as recipients.

Further information available here: <http://www.fondocomuniconfinanti.it>

Regional level:

Autonomous Province of Bolzano/ Bozen - South Tyrol

The funding for implementing digital solutions for municipalities in South Tyrol works via the Rural Development Programme and the measurement regarding the support for broadband infrastructure, including its creation, improvement and extension (http://www.provinz.bz.it/de/dienstleistungen-a-z.asp?bnsv_svid=1035304).

An important funding opportunity for smart villages consists in the provincial funding for innovations in peripheral areas, according to the decision no° 494 from the 7th of July 2020, based on the provincial law no° 79/1973 for supporting the economy and productivity (http://lexbrowser.provinz.bz.it/doc/de/220319/beschluss_vom_7_juli_2020_nr_494.aspx?view=1). For example, it provides financial resources for the innovation centre “Basis Vinschgau” in the municipality of Schlanders/ Silandro.

Several funding for scientific projects in South Tyrol is not addressed to a certain research topic, which allows the potential funding of research projects related to smart villages. The Euregio science fund of Tyrol, South Tyrol-Alto Adige and Trentino is an interregional fund where project involving partners from all three regions are admitted to funding. (<http://www.europaregion.info/en/euregio-science-fund.asp>). The fund “Research Südtirol/Alto Adige 2019” and projects under provincial Law n.14 2006 can also be considered.

In the competition for the funding of start-up companies in the province, those projects get a priority which concern branches of the specialisation sectors. Among those are the energy and environment, Alpine technologies, and ICT and automation sectors. (<http://www.provinz.bz.it/informatik-digitalisierung/digitalisierung/digitale-verwaltung/foerderung-des-ikt-sektors-und-von-start-ups.asp>)

Concerning the available funding types and the actual strategy for digitalisation (Südtirol Digital 2020), an integrated approach for digital and smart solutions seems to be missing in South Tyrol. Therefore, it could be a potential to consider such an approach in the revised strategy for digital development of the province.

Lombardy

Several schemes exist at the regional level aimed at supporting and facilitating municipalities towards a transition to a low carbon economy and digitalization. In the 2014-2020 programming period the ERDF ROP promoted a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth model in line with

the objectives identified in the “Europe 2020” strategy and with the regional government’s development policies promoting the productivity and competitiveness of its businesses and the entire economy of the Region, divided into seven priority axes.

Digitalization of the regional territory is a priority for the 2021-27 period with ERDF ROP (Regional Operational Programme) funds. In order to define specific priorities on which to operate, the Lombardy Region approved the “Piano Triennale di Trasformazione Digitale – PTTD” which defines ICT priority investments and the overall strategies which will be followed by funding opportunities. The overall plan is available at the [following link](#) and could be, a strategic asset for the implementation of Smart Villages initiatives.

Moreover, as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis, the Regional Council approved the Regional Law 9 with which the Lombardy Region allocates 3,5 billion euros for economic recovery. The program is not limited to infrastructural interventions but includes investments in various sectors. Important investments are planned for the enhancement and development of mountain territories (100 million euros) which could be vital for municipalities to implement “smart” solutions, for the digitalization and e-learning of universities (30 mil. euros) and for the revitalization of historic villages (30 mil. euros).

An overview of the Regional funding schemes which are currently running is available at the following website: <https://www.bandiregione.lombardia.it/procedimenti/new/bandi/home>

3.3.2 Austria

Apart from the LEADER program: Funding program for Digital Innovation Hubs; Funding program on Research, Technology and Innovation in Digitalization. An overview on financial support mechanisms to broadband access and the use of innovative technologies is available at <https://www.ffg.at/content/breitband-austria-2020-0>.

For Tirol, an overview of funding opportunities around digitalization is available on [digital.tirol](#). Basically, there are funding opportunities for 1) [consultation](#), 2) [research and innovation](#), and 3) [digitalization](#); Funding program for Flagship Projects in the field of Digitalization; National funding for the [regional development in Tyrol](#); Program for the [improvement of infrastructure in rural areas](#), [Special funding program for the Pitztal](#), [Special funding program for the Natura 2000 Region Isel](#)

3.3.3 Switzerland

National/Regional Level

Regional Development Policy: The Cantons or Regions have their own programs to implement the Regional Development Policy of Switzerland. Their programs have different focal points. Depending on the character of a smart village initiative and the focal points of the Regional Strategy, this can be one of the most powerful tools. However, it always needs Co-Financing

from different actors. An overview of all funding possibilities here for projects in regional development can be found here: <https://regiosuisse.ch/finanzhilfen-fuer-die-regionalentwicklung> (de / f / it).

For the period 2021 – 22, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO and the Swiss center for mountain regions SAB have launched a special initiative dedicated to encourage the Smart villages / Smart regions approach in Switzerland. Through this initiative, SECO is financing the participatory process in mountain municipalities to become a Smart village or Smart region. Funding stems from the Regional Development Policy cited above. SAB, who is also Co-Leader of AG5 of EUSALP, is promoting and coordinating this initiative and offers a first counselling service. This initiative is fully based on the experiences of the Alpine Space program Smart villages. The use of the Digital Exchange Platform, which was developed in this ASP-project, is mandatory. This initiative by SECO and SAB constitutes a concrete contribution to EUSALP. It could hence also serve as model for other countries / regions. Further information: <http://www.sab.ch/dienstleistungen/regionalentwicklung/smart-villages.html> (de / f / it).

For smart solutions in the energy sector, there is a number of financing tools: The Federal Office of Energy can support municipalities to implement smart projects that make their energy use or supply more sustainable (Projektförderung EnergieSchweiz, category 1). Pilot or demonstrations projects that explore new technologies, solutions and approaches can be supported by the “[Pilot- und Demonstrationsprogramm](#)”. ProKilowatt can support the investments in smart technology which increases energy efficiency. Municipalities or even institutions can also apply for the “Smart City Innovation Challenge”. This award can help to finance innovative projects in the field of sustainable use/supply of energy. There is also a [program for “energy-regions”](#) that supports (smart) sustainable energy solutions on an intercommunal level, as well as special programs for [photovoltaic solutions](#) or [sustainable mobility solutions](#) on communal or intercommunal level.

“[Stiftung Klimaschutz und Co2-Compensation Schweiz \(Klik\)](#)” supports initiatives that reduce the climate impact.

The foundations “Schweizer Berghilfe” and “Patenschaft Berggemeinden” might also help to finance a project if it fulfills their criteria.

3.3.4 France

National level

National fundings : FNADT coordinated with regions funds, DRAC on cultural issues. National Labels such as « Territoires à énergie positive pour la croissance verte (TEPCV) », Action territories for a digital inclusion (TANI), ... National range project financing tools such as « Aide au développement des ateliers de fabrication numérique » for the fablabs, or « Fabriques de territoires » for all third places networks, and private foundation (foundation from AFNIC which handles .fr domain names) with annual call for projects about digital solidarities. In the frame of the post covid19 action plan, there is a huge part about digital inclusion and digital empowerment, with 5.000 recruitments foreseen and different financial mechanisms.

Regional Level

Regions choose their own way to support innovation and digital issues in their territories, anyway it often relies on two types of funding : CPER which is a State / Region Plan Contract mixing state and regional funding, and european FEADER funds (in France regions are the managing authorities for FEADER funds). Different mechanisms and institutions exist in regions: such as Centre de ressources d'animation numérique territoriale («Crant» in Normandy), «Écoles Régionales du Numérique» en Occitanie..., « Coopérative des tiers lieux in Nouvelle Aquitaine »,... Regions are also in charge of professional education centers and economic development so they can approach those questions with that perspective.

In region PACA the specific label and call for projects « Sud Labs » is helping innovative projects in the field of digital support, new types of places,..

11 Hubs for digital inclusion (more or less at a regional level) have been created in 2019, trying to improve networks of digital skills support organizations, « Hinaura » in Auvergne Rhone Alpes, and « Hub du Sud » in PACA.

Departments : with two main mechanisms : social care (departments are in charge of that topic) that implies to get worried about digital inclusion, and support for equality for all territories, so departements can act as an engineering or digital support for infra territories, mainly intermunicipalities. They are also in charge for deploying broadband access for rural areas.

Dedicated Regional funding mechanisms for Smart Villages deployment and support:

Call for projects "Parcours Sud Smart Territoires" - Provence Alpes Cote d'Azur Region

The Provence Alpes Cote d'Azur Region is launching in 2021 the second edition of a call for proposals for the "Parcours Sud Smart Territoires". This regional funding aims at accelerating emergence and implementation of projects using digital technology to address territorial issues, while facilitating exchanges between professionals. This support contributes to increase the resilience of territories and to the recovery of the activity in the context of the crisis of Covid 19. In this funding framework, it is considered that a Smart Region is based on "smart territories", meaning territories that are able to take advantage of digital solutions to deliver innovative services to their users that meet the challenges of economic and sustainable development. There are many fields of application, including risk management, waste management, environment, city centers revitalization, governance or citizen relation management. More precisely, the objectives include facilitating the emergence of structuring projects, Accelerating the implementation of projects of "smart territories" exemplary in terms of energy and environmental transition, and finally promoting exemplary projects, by awarding the project developers the label Sud Smart Territoires.

More infos : <https://www.maregionsud.fr/aides-et-appels-a-projets/detail/parcours-sud-smart-territoires>

Call for projects "Smart and sustainable territories" - Bourgogne Franche Comte Region

Among the elements of its very new Public Policy of Digital Uses, the Region has launched an initiative in favor of "smart territories". The objective is to support local authorities in their digital transformation and thus to develop digital projects encompassing several fields of action specific to the territories (e-administration, e-health, e-culture, e-education...). The Region takes into account the specific problems faced by municipalities or their groupings, especially in rural areas. Also, the Region has launched an intervention regulation specifically intended for the development and construction of digital hubs or living labs, places that house

communities of actors committed to innovation. In the context of this call for projects, the "smart territory" is above all a territory that seeks to combine its development, the well-being of the citizen, the preservation of natural resources with the help of digital technology.

More infos : <https://www.bourgognefranche-comte.fr/node/2658>

3.3.5 Germany

Germany has launched several initiatives to support Smart cities and Smart villages. Some of them are listed below.

Modellprojekte Smart Cities: The Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat) has launched in 2019 and 2020 a support for model projects in urban and rural municipalities. The aim is, to support municipalities in elaborating crosssectoral digital strategies for future living. <https://www.smart-city-dialog.de/>

Modellvorhaben Heimat 2.0: The Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat) is supporting until the year 2023 8 model projects in developing and disseminating innovative digital solutions to improve services of general interest. www.bule-heimat20.de

Modellvorhaben Smarte.Land.Regionen: The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft) is supporting since 2020 model projects in different counties (Landkreise) in developing and putting into practice digital solutions in rural areas. <https://www.bmel.de/DE/themen/laendliche-regionen/digitales/smart-landregionen/mud-smarte-landregionen.html>

Land.Digital: Through this measure, the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft) is supporting 61 projects in the timeframe 2017 – 22 to master the digital transformation. More information on: https://www.bmel.de/DE/themen/laendliche-regionen/digitales/digitales_node.html

In **Bavaria**, the Bundesland is encouraging Smart villages through the network Digitales Dorf Bayern. More information on <https://digitales-dorf.bayern>.

Baden-Württemberg has launched several initiatives to support the digital transformation of municipalities and digitalization in general. Further information can be found here: <https://www.digital-bw.de/foerderung>.

4. Some concluding remarks and recommendations

As this survey shows, many financial support mechanisms exist to support the Smart villages approach. At the time of editing this publication, national and regional authorities are drafting their operational programs based on the new EU-legislation for the period 2021 – 2027. So, this document can **help those authorities** to think about the different options. In that sense, the document comes at the right moment. But it can only give a picture of the actual state and will need to be revised, once more information is available.

The document may also give **orientation and practical help** to actors on the ground, be they local authorities or private or semi-private initiators of a Smart village / Smart region approach, on where they can get financial support for their undertakings.

The ambition of EUSALP as a macroregional strategy is of course to improve cooperation across borders in the whole Alpine arc. An improved multilevel governance and a better coordination of financial support schemes is crucial in this respect. An interesting approach to improve this cooperation could be to launch **joint calls** by different regions across the Alpine arc. These joint calls can rely on the existing funding mechanisms. It's just a question of aligning them and bringing them together in joint calls. The final decision competency stays at the relevant national / regional authorities. This would be complementary to other existing mechanisms and at the same time greatly enhancing cooperation within this Macroregion.