

# European Local Innovation Forum (ELIF) Thematic Community on Territorial Development :

## Event Information

Date: 22 June 2023

Location: Online

Organisers: European Association of Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)

Participants: 87

Outcomes: 2nd meeting of this ELIF Thematic Community identified best practices and gaps in driving smart, digital and green local innovation

Web page: [www.aeidl.eu/events/elif-revitalising-community-led-innovation-in-europe/](http://www.aeidl.eu/events/elif-revitalising-community-led-innovation-in-europe/)

The 2nd meeting of the European Local Innovation Forum ([ELIF](#)) and its Territorial Development Thematic Community was successfully [held](#) on 22 June, online.

ELIF aims to foster discussions on local innovation, encompassing not only technological advancements but also taking into account local assets, place-based approaches, and the enhancement of democracy. The forum intends to bridge the existing gap in knowledge sharing and collaboration on local innovation.

[AEIDL](#) – the European Association for Innovation in Local Development- organised this ELIF event to discuss the role of local actors in [driving smart, green, and digital development in rural areas](#).

The meeting attracted a diverse group of participants, including representatives from local action groups (LAGs), consultants, research centres, civil society organizations and public officials, with a total of 200 registered attendees from 30 countries. The discussions focused on various topics, including the first public unveiling of the FAO Digital Villages (DVI) Readiness Assessment Tool, smart villages and digitalization, community-supported agriculture, and policy gaps for green, smart, and digital rural areas.

## Welcoming of participants and introduction



The event was facilitated by **Serafin Pazos-Vidal** Senior Expert, Rural and Territorial Development at AEIDL. It provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in local innovation and highlighted the importance of collaboration between different stakeholders to promote sustainable development in rural communities.

**Daniela DiGianantonio** from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) presented the Digital Villages flagship initiative (DVI) during the event. DVI focuses on agricultural development and digital innovation to address challenges faced by rural areas. The DVI Readiness Assessment Tool, consisting of 17 questions across three dimensions (digital ecosystem, leadership & governance, and strategic context), provides a comprehensive evaluation framework for communities to assess their readiness for digital transformation. The tool assigns a score from 1 to 5, indicating the DVI Readiness Level. This tool was developed by FAO together with AEIDL and a full report will be available shortly. However, you can already test and assess how smart your village is here!





**Jorge Caley** from ZWITproject presented the [Smart Rural Territory](#) approach. He discussed the importance of digitalization in improving the quality of life in rural areas. Digitalization reduces the distance to essential services and enhances access to various amenities. The speaker emphasized the need for basic infrastructure, including human resources, connectivity, management platforms, and open data, to enable smart rurality projects across different sectors such as tourism, local economy, environment, and public services.

**Brîndușa Bîrhală**, representing ECOLISE and a farmer shared [her experience](#) of implementing community-supported agriculture in West Romania. She highlighted the opportunities presented by local and global knowledge networks, affordable land prices, and existing social and physical infrastructures. However, she also noted the challenges of limited budgets, slow adoption of agroecological practices within the local community, and the need for further physical infrastructure development.



We had a very lively discussion, facilitated by AEIDL rural digitalisation expert **Leticia Abarca Velencoso** particularly through the commentary from various experts. Professor **Gianluca Brunori** from the University of Pisa and coordinator of two rural digitalisation projects [CODECS](#) and [DESIRA](#), of which AEIDL is also a key player. Professor Brunori emphasized the relevance of the DVI in addressing the digital readiness barrier identified in the [DESIRA project](#). He stressed the importance of developing tailored technologies in collaboration with end-users and the significance of smart villages' strategic capacity to identify and solve community-specific challenges.

**Eamon O'Hara** from [ECOLISE](#) commented on the growing movement of individuals like Brîndușa seeking change and building alternative food systems. They highlighted the need to recognize and value the contributions of small-scale movements in contrast to the externalized costs associated with larger-scale systems. The systemic barriers faced by these movements, including ill-fitting CAP subsidy models, were also discussed.

**Mauricio O'Brien**, from Eurocrowd, commented on the potential of [alternative funding models, such as crowdfunding](#), to address inequalities in the current financing system. He emphasized the importance of empowering new actors and fostering community engagement for the common good. The panel agreed that innovative approaches are needed to support eco-entrepreneurs and promote sustainable rural development.

The panel also considered the existing **Policy Gaps for Green, Smart and Digital Rural Areas**: a number of policy gaps that need to be addressed to promote green, smart, and digital rural areas were identified in the discussion.

Gianluca emphasized the need for public administration to take a leadership role in digitalization to prevent further digital divides. Eamon emphasized the importance of creating physical spaces and funding support for community-level interactions and removing barriers to funding for cohesive communities. Mauricio suggested that pan-European investments, coupled with the involvement of public authorities, could empower rural communities and decentralize power to foster engagement.

In the lively interaction with the public a number of other best practices were highlighted such as the [FUTURAL](#) project which just launched, where AEIDL and University of are partners to test Innovative Smart Solutions for rural areas and demonstrate community-led, social, technological and business innovations and where AEIDL leads the development EU policy recommendations and tools. Furthermore attendees shared their experiences such as the ["MyMunicipality"](#) programme from Estonia on tracking available local services, as well as initiatives to combat depopulation in Aragon (Spain).

Last but not least attendees were reminded that an great way of contributing to EU policies to deliver the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas is to [join the EU Rural Pact](#), whose Rural Pact Support Office is provided by AEIDL

### Conclusion and next steps

The 2nd meeting of ELIF Territorial Development Thematic Community provided an excellent platform for discussing local development, innovation, and digital transformation in rural areas. The presentations and discussions highlighted the significance of the DVI Readiness Assessment Tool which was for the first time unveiled in this ELIF meeting, the role of digitalization in improving quality of life, and the experiences of individuals in promoting alternative food systems. The event also identified various policy gaps that need to be addressed to facilitate green, smart, and digital rural development. The insights gained from the meeting will contribute to ongoing efforts to enhance local innovation and drive sustainable development in rural communities.

ELIF is a free, informal, and open space provided by AEIDL to bring together practitioners, stakeholders and experts interesting in exploring new ways to develop innovative local development policies and best practices. In our successive meeting we will cover all aspects of local innovation. ELIF will come back after the summer with an event on Community Led Local Development in Urban Areas. If you want to attend, you can [subscribe to ELIF here!](#)





The **European Local Innovation Forum** is a space for experts and organisations operating and connected at local level in both urban and rural settings, to facilitate the exchange of ideas, learn from experiences and draw lessons to boost innovation in local communities from across Europe.

In AEIDL, we believe that innovation driven and implemented by local communities is essential to boost the transformative changes needed in Europe. We understand local innovation as any new and creative process, service or product that emerges in a local territory as a result of engaging with local communities and actors in order to seize new opportunities or address local challenges. Local innovation offers opportunities to encourage positive change and generate local socio-economic and environmental welfare.

The ambition of our Local Innovation Forum is to maximise the power of gathering like-minded people and community-oriented organisations to help improving local living and ultimately generate more cohesion in Europe.

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