



Hilvarenbeek Smart Village

Characteristics

- Population 15.000
- In the south of the Netherlands, not too far off from a number of relatively big cities: Tilburg, Eindhoven, Breda, 's-Hertogenbosch
- Touristic (number one wildlife domain in Western Europe), commuting, agricultural and lightly industrial
- Six hamlets: two relatively large villages and four smaller ones



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Points of attention

Aging population, climate change, lodging for home starters and senior citizens, and dealing with the consequences of high-tech activities

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Acute challenge

115 Agricultural enterprises in need of transition:

- Concentration tendency (livestock factories)
- Nitrogen
- Manure
- Drive to sustainable agriculture

Risk of degradation of the rural area: derelict buildings, criminality (drug labs)

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Setting and start of Hilvarenbeek Smart Village

- Silo-like separate approaches for formal management purposes (e.g. social, spatial, economic, education, culture, finance)
- Bottom-up initiatives get lost and stuck in a maze of formalities
- Some dozen of socially committed people set up an organization to lead the way to initiators (not necessarily agriculture)

They **know** the route in government land and how to handle formalities.



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Strategy objectives

Direct:

Showing the way in the maze to initiators; thus enhancing their chances of balanced and sustainizable success: significantly more successful projects

Indirect:

- Stronger social cohesion
- A stronger social self-confidence and self-reliance

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Approach essentials

- HSV supports *collective* bottom-up initiatives. It doesn't take over, but supports where necessary; e.g., elaborating ideas, exploring funding opportunities or finding policy support.
- Emphasis on the preparation phases; the execution is the initiator's responsibility.
- No direct substantive solution for problems but rather strengthening vigor and competences of the inhabitants to take up
- Communication between the initiatives: exchanging experiences en mutual assistance
- Inspired by the Brundtland principles: economic (profit), spatial (planet) and social (people): sustainizability.

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Resource aspects

Development advisors joining forces in an expert network supporting citizen's initiatives

Development advisors are found **locally and are committed to local Challenges**

When possible they receive a modest remuneration. (mostly included in the project budget)

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Skills examples

- spatial planning,
- community building,
- public and business administration,
- legal affairs,
- project management,
- organizational development,
- fund raising



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A competence marketplace



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Organisation

- Voluntary board
- Small staff: administration, filing, accounting, formalities, subsidy management course



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Partners

- Hamlet cooperatives
- Local substantive experts
- Universities and institutes for vocational training

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Working together

- Network of experts
- Frequent “collectivity evenings”:
 - Communication: getting to know one another
 - Exchanging experiences
 - Tips and tricks

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Concrete activities

- Intake systematics:
 - Tightening formulation
 - Assessing feasibility
- Project tracking system
- Consultancy on support acquisition
- Consultancy on communication
- Subsidy management course

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Funding

- Province
 - Incidental European Funding
 - Regional rural bank
 - Private funding
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- **Recently adopted by Leader: Negotiating on the budget**

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Examples of accomplishments

Scores of successful projects: **over 100!**

- Repurposing a church into a school
- Repurposing a local pub in decline in a community center
- Strengthening a local initiative to revitalize a hamlet center
- Strengthening the board of a youth music center
- Supporting an initiative for communal housing of aging people
- Horse riding for disabled children
- Culture education in primary schools
- Nutrition education in primary schools



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Lessons to share



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Cultural requirements

- Social cohesion, community based social- cultural activities
- Founded on the strengths of the local community

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Public communication

An important PR feature is **public communication** of tangible results

- **Until now rather reticent:** modest resources
 - Word spreading
 - Newsletters
 - Website
 - Free publicity
- HSV aims to foster a robust and professional support infrastructure
- The **Leader support** will enable a far more intensive public communication, rendering the results far more commonly know



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Authority's appreciation

After some skepticism at first political administrators tend to embrace the approach; some members of the civil service corps still tend to some restraint: a matter of getting used to.



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Replicability

The local DNA as described above certainly is important.

This however is far from unique; the approach chosen **undoubtedly is replicable.**

It just needs inspiration, commitment, energy, endurance and a bit of diplomacy

More information:

https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/good-practice/hilvarenbeek-smart-village-supports-collective-initiatives-netherlands_en#tab_id=overview



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Overall aim & outcome

A growing, broadening and sustainable culture of

yes, we can!!!