



Smart Village development in practice: the Socjometr Foundation model in Pękowice

SUMMARY

Since 2021, the Socjometr Foundation has supported a Smart Village model in Pękowice that combines community engagement, strategic planning and follow-up support for implementation.

The approach is led locally by the village leader (sołtys) and residents and supported by the foundation. It has resulted in community and cultural events, educational and environmental actions, and improvements to local infrastructure and digital services, funded flexibly from national programmes, regional and environmental funds, private contributions and local budgets.



Themes: Smart and start-up villages, democracy and participation, digital technologies

Country: Poland

Organisations:

> Socjometr Foundation, non-governmental / civil society organisation

Start & end date: 01/2021 - ongoing

Budget: Variable (no single dedicated funding stream; mobilised project by project)

Funding sources:

> National programmes (e.g. NIW-CRSO NOWEFIO)

> Regional and environmental funds

> Private contributions and local municipality budget

Website: <https://socjometr.pl/obszary-dzialan/inteligentne-wsie/>

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CONTEXT

Pękowice is a small rural settlement of around 630 inhabitants in the municipality of Zielonki, near Kraków, in southern Poland's Małopolska region. Like many small villages, it has limited local services and depends on neighbouring areas for basic infrastructure, yet it retains active local organisations and community structures.

The challenge for Pękowice is how, as a small community, it can lead its own development, setting priorities, mobilising residents and turning ideas into concrete initiatives, without a single dedicated budget or a large administrative apparatus.

The Smart Village concept offers a way to address this, but it is not always well understood by residents, local authorities or national stakeholders, and is often confused with earlier village-renewal programmes.



OBJECTIVES

- > Apply the Smart Village approach as a practical framework for community-led local development in a small rural village;
- > Build local capacity to plan and act together through participatory processes;
- > Engage residents, volunteers and local organisations in identifying needs and shaping initiatives, building collective ownership of the village's future;
- > Deliver concrete improvements in community life, education, the environment, infrastructure and digital services, financed flexibly from whatever funding is available.



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The process in Pękowice is **led locally by the village leader and residents**, with the Socjometr Foundation providing the methodology, tools and guidance. It has been **organised as a continuous cycle** since 2021, combining in-person meetings with digital communication tools.

The cycle starts with consultations and surveys to **identify local needs and priorities**, followed by meetings, workshops and working groups to define development objectives and **design specific initiatives**.

It continues with **community and cultural activities** for different age groups, such as family picnics, events for older residents and workshops for children and young people. Additionally, a **series of workshops** are organised for residents and local organisations, alongside **environmental actions** such as tree planting, clean-up campaigns and ecological restoration.

Activities are guided by two principles: they are **designed to be intergenerational**, bringing together residents of different ages, and wherever possible funding is sought not only for Pękowice but also for **projects in neighbouring communities**.

Thanks to the initiative, the village's recreational facilities have been developed or improved and digital tools introduced, including an online system for managing access to local infrastructure.



RESULTS

- > A working **Smart Village model** has been embedded in Pękowice over five years and **is used to guide local decision-making, structure cooperation** between stakeholders **and support new initiatives**.
- > A wide range of concrete actions has been delivered, spanning **community and cultural events, educational workshops, environmental initiatives** and improvements to **recreational facilities and digital services**.
- > Implementation has **strengthened local capacity and ownership** by **placing local actors** (residents, volunteers and community organisations) **at the centre** of decision-making and action, with the foundation providing methodological support rather than leading the process.
- > The **digital infrastructure** developed in Pękowice provides a **self-sustaining income stream**: payments for shared facilities such as the tennis court are processed via a village app and settled monthly with the municipality, with funds ring-fenced for local needs. This has **nearly tripled the village's discretionary budget**, enabling an expanding programme of activities.
- > The case has become a **reference example for the foundation's wider work across Poland**. By June 2026, the Socjometr Foundation had developed 40 Smart Village concepts nationwide and trained dozens of practitioners.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Treat the Smart Village approach as a continuous process, not a one-off plan**: an ongoing cycle of consultation, design and delivery keeps residents engaged and lets initiatives develop gradually.
- > **Pair local leadership with the external method**: a committed village leader and active residents, combined with the foundation's structured methodology and tools, makes the model effective; neither element alone would be enough.
- > **Flexible funding enables progress without a dedicated budget**: blending funds from national, regional, environmental, private and local sources lets a small village act progressively as opportunities arise, rather than waiting for funding from one large programme.
- > **Combine tradition and modernity to reflect local identity**: pairing culturally rooted initiatives with innovative digital solutions is effective in Pękowice because the local context supports this. Małopolska's cultural richness and proximity to Kraków mean residents bring both strong local identity and openness to new ideas.
- > **Lack of awareness of the concept is a barrier**: limited understanding of Smart Villages among residents, local authorities and national stakeholders, and a tendency to equate them with older village-renewal programmes, can hold back how the approach is applied and needs to be addressed directly.



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