JOINT SOLUTIONS FOR SMART VILLAGE TRANSITION IN CENTRAL EUROPE

An analytical framework to assist smart village initiatives to support development of rural areas in Central Europe

JOINT SOLUTIONS

Smart tourism village tool

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Document information

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1 Introduction

The Smart tourism village tool is developed under the project "*More than a Village: Smart village transition, a model for more competitive and attractive villages in Central Europe.*" The European Regional Development Fund co-financed the project under the Interreg Central Europe 2021-2027 programme.

The "More than a Village - MTaV" project aims to revitalize rural areas in Central Europe by developing and testing smart village models. It addresses entrepreneurship, digitalization gaps, youth out migration, and aging populations. Key outputs include a joint strategy for smart village transition, action plans for selected areas, tools and solutions for implementing smart village models, and pilot projects testing different models. The project seeks to create jobs, stabilize rural populations, and boost economic resilience, benefiting small businesses, local communities, and authorities.

In this project, three smart tools are developed based on challenges faced, lessons learned, and conclusions from implementing the pilot actions. It aims to compile insights and best practices from pilot actions in Poland, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia, providing practical solutions to strengthen rural economies, improve digitalization, and increase rural areas' attractiveness. The first solution is a *Smart village business support tool* that contains all the information on the business support in rural areas acquired during the implementation of the pilots by the Local Action Group Association "South Warmia" (LAG SW) from Poland and Hajdú - Bihar County Government (HBCG) from Hungary. The second is a *Smart tourism village tool* that compiles information from the enactment of pilot action by the ANCI LIGURIA (ANCIL) from Italy. It concerns support for local rural entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. The third is an *Agri-food smart village tool* that provides a comprehensive agri-food smart village tool for developing and supporting local agricultural businesses and brings together lessons learned during pilot implementation of ITC – Innovation Technology Cluster Murska Sobota (ITC) from Slovenia and the City of Buzet (Buzet) from Croatia.

Rural areas often have higher levels of poverty, higher percentages of older adults, and slower-growing or declining populations. Also, the lack of entrepreneurship and digitalization leads to economic stagnation and youth out migration. To overcome these problems, the *Smart Village concept* was introduced. It is a territorial tool for strengthening the socio-economic development of rural areas. It describes communities in rural areas that use digital technologies and innovative solutions to boost the local economy and make rural areas more attractive and sustainable. The overall goal is to enhance the resilience and standard of living in rural communities. To achieve this, understanding, cooperation, and support from the public authorities are needed.

The Smart tourism village tool is designed for local authorities, providing them with practical knowledge and strategic recommendations for implementing the smart village approach within the tourism sector in rural communities. The focus is on empowering decision-makers to encourage and support the development of smart tourism through the application of smart village principles, and to foster community engagement in smart tourism initiatives.

The Smart tourism village tool outlines the framework and enabling conditions that public authorities are encouraged to establish within Smart Villages to effectively support rural entrepreneurship dedicated to the smart tourism. This tool provides structured guidelines, methodological approaches, examples of best practices, and practical templates aimed at fostering smart and sustainable tourism businesses in rural areas. The content of this document is enriched by insights and outcomes derived from the pilot implementation carried out in Italy, ensuring its applicability and relevance to real-life scenarios across different rural contexts.

The methodology used to create this *Smart tourism village tool* is based on the joint work of all project partners. ANCI Liguria (ANCIL), the association of municipalities of the Liguria region, shared insights from implementing their pilot action. *The Smart tourism village tool* was refined through partners' and stakeholders' feedback and a workshop featuring three key exercises. The participatory process enabled the pilot to combine experiences, challenges

faced, practical solutions, lessons learned, and to draw conclusions from implementing the smart village pilot. This participatory approach ensured the *Smart tourism village tool* reflects a wide range of experiences, practical advice, and tested methods, making it a valuable resource for supporting and enhancing the development of local tourism businesses.

The *Smart tourism village tool* is structured to provide a guidance for decision-makers through the key phases of smart village development, with a focus on tourism in rural areas. The tool outlines the initial steps required in the pre-planning phase, including data collection and stakeholder engagement, which are essential for effective planning. The planning phase addresses the formulation of a detailed situational analysis, development of a shared vision, definition of strategic objectives, and identification of concrete activities. The implementation phase emphasizes the execution of planned activities and the effective allocation of resources. The monitoring section provides guidance on how to track the implementation phase. Progress is reviewed in accordance with the timeframes specified in the action plan, ensuring alignment with strategic objectives and timely adjustments where necessary. The evaluation section emphasizes the importance of assessing the plan's relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. It outlines methodological approaches and techniques for conducting evaluations at different stages: ex-ante (before implementation), mid-term (during implementation), and ex-post (after completion). The final section provides recommendations and a step-by-step guide to support the development of smart tourism in rural communities at the local level. In addition, the Annexes offer a range of practical templates and tools for local authorities to use when introducing the smart village approach and enhancing local tourism development.

2 The smartness dimensions in the context of the tourism sector

2.1 Pilot in the MTaV project

The Smart tourism village tool is based on challenges, lessons learned, and practical tips gathered during the implementation of the pilot ANCI LIGURIA from Italy.

The pilot is implemented in Italy in the Alta Polcevera valley. The aim was to enhance tourism development in rural areas by utilizing digital services. It focused on developing digital services dedicated to smart working in rural areas. Publicly owned library (public space open to all, including citizens and tourists, made available by the municipalities of the area) was reorganized to also serve as a co-working space, smart working area, and a venue for conferences and events that require the use of digital technologies. Also, importance is given to the cultural and tourist offer of the area.

2.2 The smartness dimensions in theory and practice

Smart Villages can be analysed through **six smartness dimensions (or categories)**[1]. *These dimensions* work *together to create vibrant, resilient rural communities*. The smartness dimensions relate to:

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[1] MTaV - D.1.1.2 Knowledge management handbook describing working methodology and knowledge management tools.

1. *Smart Economy*

It measures creative and innovative enterprises, employment and unemployment rates, and ICT penetration. Examples of indicators are the number of enterprises, the density of enterprises, the rate of young people employed, and the number of women leading enterprises.

2. *Smart Mobility*

This dimension is related to sustainable forms of mobility. Examples of indicators are the number of non-traditional cars, the presence of restricted traffic zones, and the level of sustainability of public transport.

3. *Smart Environment*

It aims to measure the quality of water, air, soil, and all other environmental parameters, including using renewable energy. Examples of indicators are the percentage of recycled waste and air quality levels.

4. *Smart People*

Indicates the level of inhabitants' participation in decision-making processes and assesses the level of citizens' education (including digital). Examples of indicators are the number of associations in the area and equal opportunity policies.

5. *Smart Living*

Measures the quality and quantity of services, mainly services of general interest offered to the population and their degree of satisfaction. Examples of indicators are the level of services to citizens (banks, post offices, medical facilities).

6. *Smart Governance*

It indicates the digital level of public administration, the forms and functioning of e-government, and the use or non-use of green public procurement. Examples of indicators are the effectiveness of policies on waste, energy, etc.

In the early stages of developing a Smart Village, it's unclear how well different smart aspects will fit the local context. It is essential to examine all smart aspects by asking practical questions regarding their influence on improving life in local rural areas. Rural areas differ in needs, resources, and readiness. That's why it is essential to reflect on each smart dimension individually to see whether it is appropriate, practical, and realistic in the related village context. For example, while smart tourism business for the younger population may be highly relevant in one rural area, it may not be applicable in another due to low internet access. These reflections ensure the Smart Village model is adopted to meet local needs.

The experts from Poliedra - Politecnico di Milano from Italy assessed that the following dimensions are relevant to applying the smart village concept in rural tourism development. As seen from a practical example, the Mobility dimension was not considered because it does not interest any of the pilots in the MTaV project. Also, each dimension has associated criteria with a definition that serve as an indicator of smartness and an anchor for measuring implementation success.

When planning the implementation of the smart tourism support concept, it is essential to identify which dimensions of the smart village framework are relevant to the specific region.

Practical example on assessing the relevant dimension of smartness and associated indicators/criteria in rural tourism development (provided by experts in the MTaV project, Poliedra from Italy).

Dimension of smartness	Indicator/Associated criteria	Definition
Smart Governance	Existence of strategies, rules, and regulations to promote ICT literacy	Assess the presence of formal tourism policies, strategies, and regulations to enhance citizens' ICT literacy, enabling digital inclusion and smart governance practices within the tourism sector.
	Level of information, data availability, and accessibility	Measures the extent to which community members have access to accurate, relevant, and up-to-date tourism information and data for decision-making and participation in governance
	Level of investment in smart transition initiatives	Tracks governments' financial resources to projects and programs that drive the smart development of the tourism sector in rural communities.
Smart Economy	Accessibility of cultural and recreational initiatives	Measures the ease with which residents and visitors in rural communities can access cultural and recreational activities, including events, facilities, and programs.
	Economic investment in ICT sectors	Indicates the level of financial commitment to ICT industries, driving innovation and employment in rural areas related to the tourism sector.
	Adoption of circular energy solutions	Evaluate practices like energy recycling and renewable energy usage to reduce waste.

Dimension of smartness	Indicator/Associated criteria	Definition
	Economic investment in the tourism sector	Indicates the level of financial commitment to tourism industries, driving innovation and employment in rural areas.
	Level of technical ICT	Evaluates the prevalence of ICT skills within the workforce and local supporting digital initiatives.
Smart Environment	Degree of digitalization in monitoring systems	Enhances tourism data collection, analysis, and management, and evaluates the integration of digital technologies in monitoring environmental systems, such as ecosystems, water, air quality, noise, waste, and wastewater.
	Status of smart waste and recycling management	Assesses the deployment of smart technologies to optimize waste collection, sorting, and recycling, promoting resource efficiency and reducing environmental impact in the tourism sector.
	Percentage of equipped natural spaces (e.g., presence of Wi-Fi and 4 G or 5 G coverage) in the area concerned	Percentage of natural spaces with Wi-Fi and 4G or 5G coverage, where citizens can spend their free time or work in rural tourism areas.
Smart Living	Level of safety in the area	Assess the safety of the rural area where an intervention is carried out to enhance the liveability of citizens and beyond.
	The level of general interest services, such as banks, post offices, and health and social care services for young and older people.	Assesses the availability of primary services essential to the daily lives of citizens.
Smart People	Level of digitalization in rural schools	Evaluates the integration and usage of digital technologies in rural educational institutions to enhance learning outcomes and accessibility.

Dimension of smartness	Indicator/Associated criteria	Definition
	Number of associations for young and senior citizens	Evaluates the presence of associations in the area that involve people of all ages in activities related to tourism themes.
	Level of policies for promoting equal opportunities	Evaluates the level of tourism policies promoted by municipalities or institutions to improve equal opportunities.

Source: MTav project. In the MTaV project, indicators/associated criteria are defined for each dimension. Thus, the indicators serve a) to check that the implemented pilot can be defined as a smart solution and b) as anchors for measuring implementation success.

Applying all detected dimensions and related indicators/associated criteria is unnecessary. and other institutions involved in the smart transition should consider what may be most important or what they can support. Therewith, a practical example from the ANCIL from Italy is provided.

Practical example of defining detected dimensions and related indicators/associated criteria.

Dimension of smartness	Indicator/Associated criteria	Comments
Smart Governance	Existence of Strategies, Rules, and Regulations to Promote ICT Literacy	During the implementation of a pilot project, some documents from Regione Liguria will be reviewed to identify practical ideas for promoting ICT literacy among citizens.

Smart Economy	Accessibility of Cultural and Recreational Initiatives	A pilot project will improve access to recreational activities by utilizing an interactive video to share tourist proposals and promote the use of the coworking space as a resource for helpful information.
Smart Environment	Percentage of equipped natural spaces (e.g., presence of Wi-Fi and 4G or 5G coverage, etc.) in the area concerned.	The coworking space in Campomorone will be a place where citizens can spend free time or work. Also, local associations and enterprises can propose events.

Source: MTaV project, List of the dimensions with associated criteria for developing smart village tourism sector in the MTaV project – ANCIL/Italy.

3 Supporting the tourism sector: lessons learnt from MTaV pilots

The strategic planning approach may easily be followed in the smart village approach to develop tourism smart village support. It is performed in four phases: the Pre-planning phase, the Planning phase, the Implementation phase, and the Monitoring and evaluation phase. All the phases, alongside their accompanying activities, are described below.

3.1 Pre-planning phase

Once it is decided that smart village tourism support should be offered to interested local rural entrepreneurs, it is highly recommended that a Stakeholder group be established. Such a group should support local governments and other institutions involved in the smart transition throughout all the mentioned phases of implementing the smart rural tourism model.

Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or entities that have an interest in a business's and/or project's outcomes. They are divided into primary stakeholders (those who experience a project or initiative's direct impact) and secondary stakeholders (those with indirect involvement, e.g., through business relationships). They can be internal (from the same organisation and involved in the business and its outcomes), and external (interact from outside and are interested in performance, but not on a daily basis). The following table shows how stakeholders can be analysed in terms of their influence, interest, and levels of participation in the project (external – internal stakeholders, direct – indirect involvement)[2].

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[2] GOOD/Participatory Governance IN Cultural Heritage - How to involve public,, Interreg Central Europe project "For Heritage (4H): Excellence for integrated heritage management in central Europe", https://programme2014-20.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/ForHeritage.html

Stakeholder type		Who are they?	Stakeholders' level of interest	Stakeholders' level of influence
			How interested in the project and its outcome are they?	*How powerful (in terms of influencing the project) are they?*
Internal	**Partners**	Working team, team leader, consultant companies, contractors, suppliers, legal, regulatory administrations	Highly interested in completing the project within the timeframe and the identified budget	High influence They actively contribute to a project and have the power to help make it successful (or to derail it)
External	**Beneficiaries**	Professionals, entrepreneurs, investors, financial institutions, politicians, and leaders of society	Primarily interested in completing the project with reasonable costs, repayment of the investment in a reasonable period, increasing prestige and experience, etc.	High influence They have the power to influence it greatly if they become interested
	Final beneficiaries	The public and marginalised groups	Interested in the outcome of a project because they are directly affected by the outcome	Low influence They can voice their support in the community, positively influence the project, and change its scope, but they have little actual power to influence the effort in any way
	Indirect stakeholders and beneficiaries	Opportunists, activists, media, other members of the community, or area	Highly interested	There is a possibility to influence the project

Partners are people or institutions participating in building or delivering a project.

The project beneficiaries are those who will benefit from the project.

Final beneficiaries are those who benefit in the long term.

Indirect stakeholders/beneficiaries are those who will be impacted by or impact the project, though they don't directly participate in working on it.

Practical example of how the ANCIL from Italy analysed Interests, Contributions, and Constraints of their stakeholders[3].

		Municipality	Business Associations/SME/Start-ups/Cooperatives	Citizen organisations, Women's organisations
Interest		Better quality of life for residents (well-being, work, new tourist services) New economic opportunities in tourist services Improved the digitalisation level	New business opportunities Better circumstances for residents Turning traditions and assets into economic value	Wider involvement of citizens Bringing different actors together Stronger link with municipalities in tourism opportunities
Contribution		Invest in the local tourism sector Mobilize citizens Inform citizens Help in revealing the economic ecosystem for youth	Integrate tourism with other sectoral developments Develop new types of marketing	Invest in local tourism offers Inform visitors

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[3] MTaV - D.1.1.3 Stakeholder Mapping.

Constraint	Potential difficulties in collaboration with other municipalities outside the valley	Potential lack of currently available funding sources	Potential lack of capacity
	Potential lack of trust of citizens towards policy actors		

What is the role of the Stakeholder group?

By engaging stakeholders, diverse perspectives are incorporated, and projects are more likely to address real-world problems and develop practical solutions. This improves project quality, efficiency, and long-term success. Stakeholders' exchange of good practices and lessons learned across regions while promoting policy innovation makes learning available at various levels. When learning from them, **they co-own the solution tailored to their needs**. Through co-decision and validation, external stakeholders influence the solutions developed within the project, ensuring a participatory approach. Furthermore, stakeholders facilitate the broad dissemination of smart village tourism sector solutions through their own networks via extensive outreach activities. In short, they bring input for the analysis of the current state; inform, consult, collaborate, and validate results of the common efforts; they bring ideas and opinions; and validate final solutions.

What is the recommended number of stakeholders?

The exact number of stakeholders is not determined. The number of stakeholders involved is critically linked to the area's dimensions and demographics. Still, it also depends on the societal, demographic, and economic structure, as well as the type of tourism smart village solution. It is, however, important to have a broad and diverse group of stakeholders who will bring different views, experiences, and expectations. For example, they can come from:

1) Public administrations/Public entities/Policy makers,

2) Academia/Research institutions/Innovation parks/Digital innovation hubs,

3) Tourism businesses/Tourism business associations/SMEs in tourism/Start-ups/Cooperatives/Enterprises/Economic actors/Tourism boards,

4) Civil society/Citizen organizations/NGOs

A thorough understanding of stakeholders' behaviours, motivations, relationships, interests, and their actual or potential influence and resources, regardless of how many stakeholders are involved, is crucial. Based on data collected through instruments such as surveys, workshops, open forums, interviews, and focus groups, effective stakeholder management strategies can be designed. These strategies should address optimal engagement methods and communication approaches tailored to different stakeholder groups.

How can the stakeholder group be engaged?

After appointing stakeholders as members of the SG, it is time to engage them in the implementation process of the smart tourism village concept. They often want to be involved in the decision-making process. In that case, they are more likely to trust the project because they understand how and why decisions are made. Also, involvement offers a chance to protect and promote the interests of those somehow affected by the outcomes of decisions. However, as mentioned before, the process of their involvement starts much earlier than the Implementation phase.

Thus, SG can be involved from the very beginning by getting input for the analysis of the current state; by bringing ideas and opinions; or at the end of the implementation, namely in the Monitoring and evaluation phase by validating final documents to be prepared within the project, etc.

Practical example of how the ANCIL from Italy engaged stakeholders in the creation of the web platform.

ANCI Liguria gathered the mayors of the five local municipalities for the Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) meeting. The goal was to introduce the MTaV project, share its purpose, and initiate a conversation about how it can positively impact the area.

The mayors shared ideas and showed interest in what it could look like in their communities. The understanding of what this project is about, and what kind of approach would be most effective in reaching local citizens and tourists.

Together, the group explored how to involve institutions, local businesses, associations, individuals and tourists. The mayors were invited to suggest stakeholders from their territories who could bring ideas, knowledge and expertise.

Mayors were invited to discuss:

• What tourism opportunities already exist in Val Polcevera?

• What do they want to achieve through this pilot?

• How can each of them contribute?

Some of the conclusions of the meeting were:

• Innovation and digital tools could improve local services and make life easier for residents.

- Tourism could be a real opportunity for Val Polcevera if developed sustainably.

- Enhancing digital access and skills is crucial, particularly for younger generations and small businesses.

- Position the village as an attractive destination for digital nomads seeking a unique experience that goes beyond what Genoa typically offers. Since this is a global remote work trend, it can help to attract longer-term visitors.

How to communicate with the Stakeholder group?

Successful and effective stakeholder engagement often relies on stakeholder experience gained through communication.

The number of meetings depends on several factors. For example, if the project is complex, more frequent or detailed, meetings will be necessary to ensure alignment with the planned activities and manage risks. Often, the planning phase requires more meetings, while later stages need fewer, more focused updates. If stakeholders are highly involved or affected by the project, more meetings may be necessary to keep them informed and engaged. Apart from in-person meetings, e-mail or online meetings may be used for some activities. It may also depend on the stakeholders' preferences, for example, one stakeholder prefers to be regularly updated, while others are satisfied with periodic updates.

Regardless of the method chosen for communication with a Stakeholder group, it is necessary to provide them with information about progress and changes, and to regularly provide answers to their questions. Meetings with stakeholders can also serve to seek their support, obtain resources from them, and coordinate their future work, especially if a milestone is approaching.

To achieve all this, it is essential to encourage stakeholders to be involved and to communicate effectively. This is described in more detail in chapter 3.2.1.

3.2 Planning phase

This phase relates to the following steps:

a) State-of-the-art analysis
b) Determining the vision
c) Determining the objectives
d) Determining the measures and activities to be performed

3.2.1 State-of-the-art analysis

State-of-the-art analysis entails analyzing the selected topic. It is usually done using the method of desk research analysis, which involves studying the available documentation, such as statistical data, strategic and planning documents, and professional and scientific papers.

To gain a deeper understanding of the topic, further analysis should be done via the Stakeholder group: meetings can be organized with them in *focus groups*. Focus group is a qualitative technique which uses in depth group interviews with participants that are chosen based on their knowledge on the specific topic that is being studied (Rabiee, 2004). Focus groups are beneficial when gathering information on residents' or entrepreneurs' needs, preferences, and problems. They are easy to execute, and that is their greatest strength. The moderator actively encourages stakeholders to express their opinions and respond to other participants' and moderators' questions. Responses in a focus group are *spoken*, *open-ended*, *relatively broad*, and *qualitative*. Nonverbal communications and group interactions can also be observed. Focus groups can get closer to people's thoughts and feelings, even though their responses may be more complex.

> Tips on how to conduct an effective local needs assessment for Smart Tourism:
>
> ✓ Collect demographic, socio-economic, and digital infrastructure data
>
> ✓ Identify local tourism assets and challenges
>
> ✓ Engage diverse stakeholders through focus groups and interviews
>
> ✓ Map existing tourism policies and plans
>
> ✓ Document successful tourism-related initiatives (local or regional)
>
> ✓ Evaluate the digital readiness of entrepreneurs and public services

Additionally, *interviews* with knowledgeable individuals may be organized to gain even more nuanced information on the topic. *Interview* is a method appropriate in situations regarding the collection of in-depth information on participants' thoughts, opinions, experiences, and feelings, and is useful for complex questioning (Easwaramoorthy, 2006). This approach allows for a deeper understanding of personal experiences, opinions, and context relevant to the research focus. Stakeholder groups may be an essential source of information on the possible interviewees. The number of interviews conducted depends on how many stakeholders can meaningfully contribute to the topic.

Good practice examples may also be helpful in state-of-the-art analysis. Good (best) practice is "a method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is used as a benchmark within a particular discipline or field" (van Heck and Vervest, 2009). While they are not always available, research to collect good practices is valuable. Researching good practices provides a good start built on real-world experience and supports evidence-based decision-making. Before the collection of good practices, it is necessary to determine what is considered as a good practice and what is applicable to the related territory. Only after that good practice collection may be performed since only those cases meeting the determined criteria will be sought for.

Examples of data that can be collected about good practices

General data about good practice

Description of good practice

Description of the good practice – **main aspects** (its scope, implementation, and main features).

In which **smartness dimension(s)** does this good practice work?

Does this good practice have any possible **links with your action**?

Main lessons learnt and main recommendations:

Main challenges encountered while implementing the good practice

Main lessons learnt from the good practice and its implementation

What is the main message you derive from this good practice?

What is the main success story that led you to select it?

What are the main recommendations from these good practices that you wish to communicate to the other rural areas?

Examining what worked well and what didn't in different communities can help avoid repeating mistakes. Proven solutions can be identified and adapted to local needs, thus accelerating implementation and reducing the need to start from scratch. Transferring a good practice from one rural region to another is not straightforward. Care should be given to the good practice results rather than the implementation process. Transferability depends on the specificities of each rural area and requires significant support from local authorities. The stakeholder group might again be a valuable source in such an activity, but other partners, such as universities and/or research institutes, may also be engaged. Good practice examples are available on the Interreg

Europe Policy Learning Platform and in the Further Reading chapter. Here are some documents with good practice examples.

> **Where to find good practice examples?**
>
> [Smart solutions](#) The Smart Solutions Database provides access to a wide range of innovative practices adaptable to various local contexts from Smart Rural 21.
>
> [Good practices](#) Good practices catalogue from Smart Alps platform.
>
> [Smart Communities](#) Examples of smart rural communities / smart villages elaborated in detail, including a short description of the community/village, key aspects of its 'smartness', journey of becoming smart (smart solutions), thematic area in focus, and aspects of community engagement.
>
> [Pilot project - Publications Office of the EU](#) Project funded by the European Commission to define Smart Villages and identify best practices and case studies.

Once the recommended methods have been applied, the knowledge gained should be presented and grouped along the most critical subtopics, highlighting the *challenges*, *needs, and development potentials*. Such a holistic analysis should reveal the most pressing challenges in applying the smart village concept to tourism business development. It also discovers which opportunities may mitigate weaknesses and which strengths can be used to avoid threats. In Annex 1, a template for analysing challenges, needs, and development potentials can be found.

An example of the challenges and development potentials encountered while implementing smart tourism village.

Challenge: Acceptance of coworking space and use of ICT in daily activities.

⇒ Development potential: Create an open-access area within the co-working space, where residents can get support from technical consultants. This will help them feel more confident using digital tools in their everyday work and activities.

⇒ Development potential: promote a co-working space among different targeted groups and generations using tailored promotional materials (e.g., for the young generation, promotion can be in the form of a strip).

Challenge: Engaging key stakeholders to provide their support for the co-working space.

⇒ Development potential: Involve key stakeholders through open dialogue and joint activities, helping them see the value of the coworking space and encouraging their ongoing support.

Challenge: Lack of interest among tourists.

⇒ Development potential: Increase tourist engagement by developing promotional materials that highlight the unique offerings of the space. Strengthen collaboration with local tourist offices and agencies to improve visibility and integrate the space into tourist information channels and experiences.

⇒ Development potential: Promote tourism for digital nomads, congress tourism.

SWOT analysis is another method useful for the state-of-the art analysis. It stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, and offers a simple way of organizing gathered information. A fuller awareness of the situation helps with strategic planning and decision-making. SWOT analysis

can help explore possibilities or solutions to challenges, identify opportunities for success in the context of threats, and determine whether a change is possible. For example, a cooperation of the local governments of five municipalities can make it easier to apply for future funding or expand the pilot. Weaknesses lie in weak internet connectivity and a weak digital infrastructure. This can limit the functionality of smart working spaces. Also, not all residents may feel confident using digital tools, especially older generations. Opportunity is a growing trend of remote work tourism (digital nomads). More people are looking for quiet, comfortable places in the rural areas where they can work and relax at the same time. With its beautiful landscape and new smart services like co-working spaces, Alta Polcevera can attract these visitors. The surrounding natural environment offers opportunities for hiking, biking, and eco-tourism. Potential threats could involve resistance among residents if they don't see immediate economic benefits.

SWOT analysis will be more effective if advantage of many stakeholders is taken. For example, each stakeholder offers a different perspective on the strengths and weaknesses and has various experiences. The best results come when the process is collaborative and inclusive. This type of analysis is particularly relevant for future steps in the implementation of the smart village tourism concept, that is determining the vision, and goals.

The following elements are particularly relevant for identification through the SWOT analysis:

- *Demographic trends*. Key factors to analyse include the population size, age distribution, income levels, and education levels within the local community.
- *Infrastructure*. Rural areas often face challenges such as unreliable transportation networks, limited access to high-speed internet, inadequate energy supply, or a shortage of commercial and co-working spaces. These constraints can hinder logistics, digital service delivery, communication, and talent attraction.
- *Local resources and assets*. Rural communities often possess unique strengths, such as natural landscapes, agricultural products,

traditional skills, cultural heritage, or tourism appeal, that can be leveraged to create value.

> *Organization*. Refer to how the rural community is run, its systems, decision-making processes, leadership roles, and resources.

In Annex 2, a template for SWOT analysis can be found.

3.2.2 Determining the vision

Once the analysis has been done, the future vision of the smart village tourism business model needs to be determined. *Vision is the overall goal you want to achieve, or the "place" you want to be in the future.* It describes the smart village's desired long-term results, meaning, and purpose.

The vision is best defined using a participatory approach while working with the Stakeholder group. The previous analysis of the state-of-the-art serves as a basis for determining the vision. The participatory approach allows access to the participants' "collective intelligence" (understanding and learning from multiple perspectives), which is why it is highly recommended. Thus different opinions are heard and the process of sensitization occurs until a final joint vision is brainstormed.

3.2.3 Determining the objectives

Alongside the vision, the same workshop organized with the Stakeholder group should be used to determine the **objectives** of implementing the planned tourism smart village model. Alongside objectives, it is beneficial to identify and establish relevant **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** that will measure progress toward each objective and milestone. Objectives are usually divided in strategic goals and specific objectives. The strategic **goal** is a planned intention (end result) of work preceded by achieving one or more specific objectives, also planned. **Specific objectives** are smaller parts of strategic goals. While strategic goals are long-term, specific objectives are usually set by a shorter deadline. In a practical example, the ANCIL/Italy has set a strategic goal within the MTaV project.

Practical example of the strategic goal set Ancil/Italy within the MTaV project

The strategic goal is to develop digital services that will strengthen rural tourism and enhance local capacity for smart tourism. By leveraging digital solutions and enhancing local tourism offerings, it is aimed to create attractive opportunities for visitors and residents, fostering long-term growth in rural areas.

All objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART), which allows for better progress tracking. Stakeholders should be engaged in the goal-setting process. This participatory approach fosters buy-in and commitment. When brainstorming, focus must be on high-impact objectives that align with the vision. Setting too many objectives can lead to scattered focus and weaker results. Although there may be several strategic objectives, the recommendation is to keep up to three of them. For example, the ANCIL from Italy has set two objectives, which helped them keep focus but still align with the vision. To better measure the progress, two KPIs are set[4].

The Check-list may be a handy tool in this process (see Annex 3 for template).

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[4] MTaV D2.1.1 - Joint approach and methodology for pilot planning, implementation and evaluation

Practical example of how ANCIL from Italy set its objectives and KPIs.

Objective	KPI's	Description	Target value
OBJECTIVE 1 Co-working space establishment	KPI01 KPI02	The number of small businesses, especially accommodation facilities, that will benefit from the pilot action	5
OBJECTIVE 2 Promotion of the co-working space		The number of citizens and tourists who would benefit from the co-working spaces	300

When planning support for the development of the tourist smart village model, local governments can set the following goals, in line with their authority:

- ✓ **Development and support of local entrepreneurs**. Advisory services, including mentoring, education, and support from local development agencies and business support centres, ensure access to financing, subsidies, microloans, and EU funds.
- ✓ **Use of Technology in Business**. Digital infrastructure: internet, IoT, smart sensors; digital tools for tourism and crafts; e-commerce and digital marketing; platforms for collaboration and knowledge/experience exchange – e.g., e-learning, online consulting.
- ✓ **Local Partnerships and Citizen Participation**. Networking with other smart villages and social entrepreneurship.

3.2.4 Determining the measures and activities to be performed

A separate workshop with the stakeholders should be organized to determine the measures and concrete activities for each previously set specific objective. The **measures** relate to the sets of activities undertaken to achieve

a desired outcome; they can be e.g. preventive, protective, control, restrictive, etc. measures. A protective measure, for example, could be educating local residents on how to manage tourism in a sustainable manner. This helps the community actively shape a better future. On the other hand, a restrictive step like limiting the number of tourist accommodations can prevent overcrowding and protect the village's charm. Furthermore, activities are concrete actions implemented under a specific measure to achieve the goal. They must be clear, have the designated coordinators (possibly also partners in the implementation) and the time-frame of their implementation, and include costs and funding sources alongside measurable success indicators.

The previously set strategic goals, specific objectives, measures and activities are usually presented in the tabular form of the Action plan. The Action plan template is given in Annex 4.

Here are some activity proposals on how to attract digital nomads to rural areas.

➢ *Offer incentives for long-term stay*
  ✓ Provide tax breaks, discounts on accommodation, or grants for digital nomads who stay longer than 3 months.
  ✓ Partner with local landlords to create affordable rental options.
➢ *Promote the region's lifestyle*
  ✓ Highlight the area's natural beauty, hiking trails, cultural heritage, and slow-living lifestyle in promotional materials.
  ✓ Create storytelling campaigns with testimonials from other digital nomads who have lived there
➢ *Foster a welcoming community*
  ✓ Organize meetups, networking events, language exchanges, and cultural integration activities.

- ✓ Pair nomads with local "buddies" to help them integrate quickly and learn about the area.

➢ *Building a local support network for nomads*
  - ✓ Provide concierge-type assistance, including information on health, transportation, bureaucracy, and banking, within the co-working space.
  - ✓ Create a website or an app that gathers all the necessary information for digital nomads in one place.

➢ *Encourage local businesses to adapt*
  - ✓ Train local businesses to understand the needs of remote workers (e.g., power outlets, quiet spaces, flexible hours).
  - ✓ Offer incentives to cafes, restaurants, and shops that create nomad-friendly environments.

➢ *Strengthen transport connections*
  - ✓ Improve accessibility with shuttles or better connections to Genoa and nearby airports or train stations.
  - ✓ Offer information and discounts on eco-friendly transportation options, including bicycles and shared cars.

Together with the Action plan, risks for the implementation phase should be considered. Risk is defined as the potential occurrence of unforeseen or undesired events that may hinder the achievement of objectives set out in the Smart Tourism Village Action Plan. Within the context of Smart Village planning and implementation, risks may be operational, financial, or strategic in nature. Typical examples include weak communication and limited promotion of new measures aimed at fostering smart tourism within the local community, low tourist turnout, and similar challenges. Early identification of such risks is essential for the development of effective mitigation strategies, ensuring resilience and continuity throughout the smart tourism development process. The table below presents a sample risk assessment matrix, outlining selected risks associated with the implementation of the Smart Tourism Action Plan in rural communities, along with targeted mitigation measures aimed at minimising their potential impact.

Practical example of how the ANCIL from Italy identified risks and the mitigation measures to address them[5].

Risk ID	Description	Likelihood	Level of severity	Mitigation measures
1	Failure to communicate the benefits of the co-working space to citizens and businesses and consequently having low utilisation of the space	Low	Medium	Strong collaboration with stakeholders to promote the utilisation of co-working spaces
2	Fear that tourists may choose Genoa over the village, perceiving it as a more attractive or well-known tourist destination	Medium	Medium	Develop a unique and authentic tourism offer that highlights the village's distinctive experiences, and implement targeted marketing campaigns to differentiate it from larger cities like Genoa

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[5] MTaV D2.5.3 – Mid-term evaluation report

3.3 Implementation phase

This is the most "active" phase regarding the performance of the planned activities. It simply entails that the planned activities are performed by the designated stakeholders and possible partners in a determined time frame, with designated funding and measurable indicators. Thus, it regards the actual implementation of the activities set in the Action plan table.

3.4 Monitoring the Implementation

Monitoring is a structured and continuous process that begins once t he Smart Tourism Village Action Plan for rural communities has been formally adopted and continues throughout its implementation. Its purpose is to track whether planned activities are being carried out within the timeframes specified in the Action Plan. Monitoring is typically carried out by local authorities, who are responsible for ensuring that the plan is implemented in accordance with the defined timeline and that the key performance indicators (KPIs) are being met. Continuous monitoring throughout the implementation phase enables the early identification of delays or challenges, allowing for timely adjustments and more efficient use of resources. It also serves as a practical tool for steering the implementation process and increasing the likelihood of successfully achieving the strategic goals defined in the plan.

To support this process, it is recommended to develop a tracking matrix that provides a clear overview of planned activities, responsible actors, deadlines, indicators, implementation status, and any notes or alerts related to progress.

In Annex 5, there is an example of a monitoring sheet.

3.5 Evaluation

Evaluation is a structured process aimed at assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of activities planned and implemented within the smart tourism development framework in rural communities. It complements regular monitoring by offering deeper insight into whether the strategic actions are achieving the intended results and

remain aligned with local needs and smart tourism development priorities. Evaluation also supports decision-makers by verifying whether the strategic document is aligned with the needs of local communities and situated within the broader development context.

Evaluation should take place in three key phases: ex-ante, mid-term, and ex-post. Ex-ante evaluation is conducted before implementation begins and focuses on the relevance and internal logic of the planned interventions. Mid-term evaluation takes place during implementation and assesses ongoing progress, identifying potential delays, gaps, or inefficiencies that may require timely adjustments. Ex-post evaluation occurs after implementation is completed and focuses on long-term outcomes, sustainability, and the overall impact of the measures and actions undertaken. To ensure objectivity, impartiality, and professional standards, evaluation should be carried out by independent external experts. External evaluators bring an unbiased perspective, strengthen the credibility of findings, and contribute to higher-quality recommendations.

Each evaluation should follow a series of key steps: defining the scope and objectives of the evaluation; selecting appropriate evaluation criteria and indicators; collecting and analysing relevant qualitative and quantitative data; consulting key stakeholders where appropriate; drawing conclusions based on evidence; and formulating recommendations. By conducting the evaluation, the aim is to strengthen accountability, enhance transparency, and ensure the effective use of resources throughout all phases of the Smart Torism Village planning proces, ranging from situational analysis and strategic framework development to the preparation and implementation of the Action Plan.

Evaluation allows all involved stakeholders to reflect on progress achieved, identify implementation challenges, and extract lessons learned, thereby fostering a collaborative environment for continuous improvement. It also helps to identify best practices and effective approaches that can be replicated or adapted in other local contexts. It provides insights and evidence-based recommendations that support stakeholders in optimising the planning process and implementation efforts, while ensuring that all actions

remain aligned with the overarching goals and values of the Smart Tourism Village concept.

Key steps that the evaluation process includes:

➢ *Document Review*

A thorough review of planning documents, including the Action Plan, financial reports, monitoring data, and other relevant materials, is conducted to establish a baseline for evaluation. This step provides essential quantitative indicators for assessing implementation performance.

➢ *Interviews and focus groups*

Structured interviews and thematic focus group discussions are conducted with key stakeholders. These provide qualitative insights into how the implementation process aligns with strategic objectives, uncover perceptions, and identify factors influencing success or delay.

➢ *Progress Tracking*

By comparing findings from document analysis and stakeholder input, evaluators can assess whether the implementation is progressing in accordance with the plan and to what extent the planned goals and KPIs are being achieved.

➢ *Risk and Challenge Assessment*

Evaluation identifies operational, financial, and strategic challenges encountered during implementation, along with the mitigation strategies used. This step provides insight into the resilience and adaptability of the approach taken.

➢ *Good Practices and Lessons Learned*

A final component of evaluation is the identification of successful practices that can be replicated in other contexts, and lessons learned that inform future planning. These insights are crucial for institutional learning, continuous improvement, and scaling the Smart Village model.

A list of proposed interview questions intended to support the evaluation of the Smart Tourism Village Action Plan is provided in Annex 6.

4 Recommendations on how to plan support for the tourism sector - a step-by-step approach

The step-by-step approach is based on the joint work of all project partners on the "More than a Village—MTaV" project. Although this approach provides a reasonable basis for every entrepreneurial theme, it is not universal and cannot be applied to every theme.

STEP 1. Pre-planning phase

Gathering data, and prioritizing stakeholder collaboration to address local challenges and leverage rural advantages.

STEP 2. Planning phase

State-of-the-art analysis: analyzing the selected topic through desk research and stakeholder focus groups to better understand challenges, needs, and development potentials.

Determining the vision: defining the overall long-term goal and desired future state for the smart village agri-food model through collaborative workshops with the stakeholder group.

Determining the objectives: definition of specific, measurable goals and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in collaboration with the Stakeholder group to track progress toward the vision.

Determining the activities to be performed: organisation of a workshop with stakeholders to define concrete actions for each objective, including designated coordinators, costs, funding, and success indicators.

STEP 3. Implementation phase

Performing planned activities by designated stakeholders within a determined timeframe, utilizing allocated funding and measurable indicators.

STEP 4. Monitoring activities

Focuses on assessing the success of implemented activities against set KPIs to ensure the smart village model's effectiveness. Regular monitoring allows for necessary adjustments to improve outcomes and ensure the smart village grows strongly and sustainably.

STEP 5. Evaluation process

It supports decision-makers by verifying whether the strategic document aligns with the needs of local communities and is embedded within the broader development context. This is carried out through three key phases each providing critical insights at different stages of the planning and implementation cycle.

Recommendations for planning tourism smart village support are based on the challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities from the pilot implementation in the "More than a Village—MTaV" project. Understanding them is essential for tourism stakeholders, local entrepreneurs, policymakers, support organizations, citizens and tourists seeking to foster rural revitalization.

Here are the examples of possible challenges and potential solutions on how public authorities and other institutions involved in the smart transition can help and support.

What if…

> *…digital literacy among community members participating in Smart Village initiatives* is low, and can reduce the effectiveness of digital tools?

Public authorities can:

- ✓ provide support by offering subsidies or tax incentives to those who invest in digital upskilling.
- ✓ develop partnerships with technology providers to provide local community with affordable digital tools and services.

✓ share digital co-working spaces with internet access and training support.

What if…

…proper promotion, valuable results, lessons, and success stories aren't shared widely?

Public authorities can:

✓ fund storytelling campaigns, creating platforms (like websites, newsletters, or social media channels), and organizing public events or exhibitions that showcase achievements.
✓ connect local tourism stakeholders in rural areas with regional and national media or invite them to speak at relevant conferences and fairs.

What if…

…there is unsatisfying communication with stakeholders?

Public authorities can:

✓ establish communication protocols with response timelines, regular check-ins, etc.
✓ ensure transparency and access to updates by forming, e.g., shared platforms.
✓ escalate non-responsiveness through formal channels and emphasize accountability.

What if…

…there is negative feedback from stakeholders?

Public authorities can:

✓ organise collaborative feedback meetings with stakeholders to address concerns constructively.

- ✓ reframe negative feedback so stakeholders can provide a possible solution. For example, ask "How do you propose we address this?"
- ✓ show stakeholders they are heard, and through discussion, joint solutions can be found.

What if…

> *…there is a lack of stakeholders' understanding of the urgency?*

Public authorities can:

- ✓ organise a meeting to communicate project timelines and dependencies, showing how delays impact broader goals.
- ✓ highlight benefits of timely participation and the possible risks, especially when public interest or funding is involved.
- ✓ offer a flexible timeline for input to reduce barriers to involvement.

What if…

> *…infrastructure is inadequate (e.g., poor internet connectivity, unreliable transportation, and limited access to energy)?*

Public authorities can:

- ✓ invest in high-speed broadband to support digital services, remote work, e-commerce, and smart solutions.
- ✓ upgrade transport infrastructure, such as rural roads and public transport links, invest in bicycle and hiking routs.
- ✓ provide subsidies or grants for local entrepreneurs
- ✓ prioritize rural areas in national infrastructure plans.

What if…

> *…there isn't enough interest from tourists?*

Public authorities can:

- ✓ partner with the nearest tourist center to create and promote joint tourism programs that attract visitors to both destinations.
- ✓ launch targeted promotional campaigns aimed at digital nomads, highlighting the unique advantages of their municipalities for remote work and long stays.
- ✓ collaborate with tour operators to include the rural area in their travel packages and bring a steady flow of guests.

What if…

…there is resistance to change because of traditional mindsets?

Public authorities can:

- ✓ engage community leaders, older, and trusted local figures – local heroes.
- ✓ support intergenerational programs where young people introduce digital tools while learning from the older residents.
- ✓ provide training that respects local knowledge and combines tradition with innovation.
- ✓ organise workshops where good practice can be shared (where innovative solutions have improved life), showing the development potential, thus helping people relate to positive change.

5 Conclusions

Local governments willing to support development of the smart tourism village should follow the usual strategic planning approach but previously decide on the smartness dimensions which they are willing and capable to apply. It is not necessary to follow the textbook smartness dimensions, but to select those that apply to a certain territory depending on the context. However, it is essential to have a common understanding of the smartness concept – it does not include activities related only to application of digital solutions; rather it includes a much wider concept for planning inclusive, viable, environmentally friendly, community-oriented well-being solutions.

In the development of the smart tourism village, it is highly recommended to follow all the four phases (Pre-Planning; Planning; Implementation; and Monitoring and Evaluation) and the related sub-phases explained in this tool as they greatly ensure that the usual errors are avoided.

Participatory approach used for working with the established Stakeholder group (SG) is essential for targeting the most pressing issues, for the quality of the reached solutions, and ensuring durability and sustainability of outputs, since the SG co-owns them. This is why the SG should be involved throughout the whole process of the development of the smart tourism village business.

A good state-of-the-art analysis ensures that the development of the smart tourism village has been well grounded on the met challenges and needs, while using the detected development potentials. This is why it should be thoroughly performed using the various methods (e.g. desk research, interviews, focus groups, good practice analysis, etc.). SWOT analysis proves to be especially handy since it serves well in generating the vision to be achieved.

The vision can be defined in the short-term, mid-term or long-term time-frame. Short-term (e.g. 1 year) is usually not enough for setting the smart tourism village business, and long-term (e.g. 10 or more years) is not probable since most local governments strategically plan within their political mandate

time-frames. It is usual to set the vision for a mid-term time-frame (3-5 years), making it optimal for the smart tourism village business. However, it does not mean that complex projects cannot be planned even for longer terms, depending on their implementation complexity, political stability and challenges in the economic and social environment. Based on this, strategic goals as well as specific objectives are derived, alongside measures and activities gathered in a clearly defined Action plan followed by its implementation.

Once the implementation of the model has been set, the work does not stop there: it is necessary to monitor the very implementation process and to perform its evaluation, which serves for possible adjustments if something goes wrong. Finally, once the work has been done, it is handy to ensure that it is visible for others who want to implement a similar concept, since sharing of experiences is a way to ensure inspiration and transferability.

6 Sources and further reading

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7 Annexes – useful templates

Annex 1. Form for analysing challenges, needs and development potentials

Challenges	Needs	Development potentials

Annex 2. Template for SWOT analysis

Internal factors

STRENGHTS	WEAKNESSES
SWOT	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

External factors
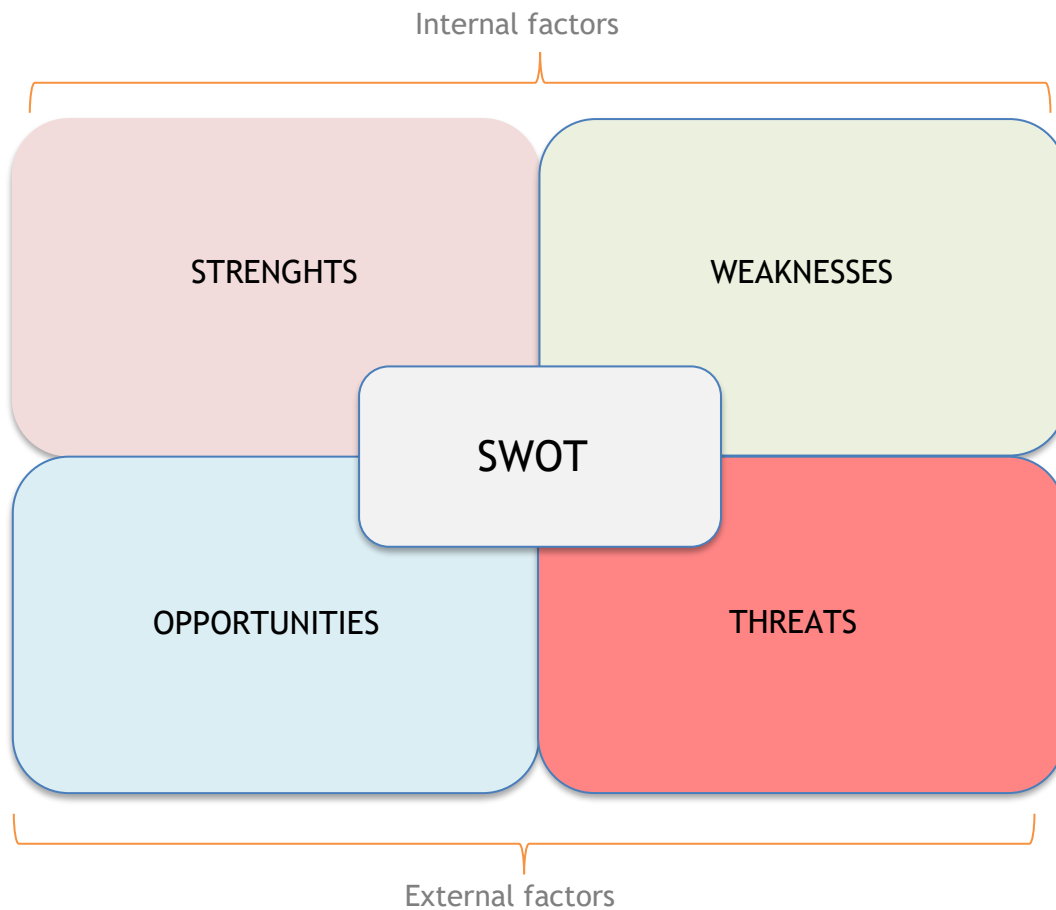
Element to be checked	YES	NO	Comment
1. Are all resources secured for a smooth planning process?			
Are participants available and willing to participate in the planning process?	☐	☐	
Are the participants aware of their roles and responsibilities in the planning process?	☐	☐	
Do the participants in the planning process have the appropriate competencies?	☐	☐	
Has the necessary budget been allocated for the planning process?	☐	☐	
Is the necessary infrastructure in place to ensure a smooth planning process (e.g., IT support, premises, tools)	☐	☐	
2. Have procedures been established to monitor progress in the planning process?			
Have clear indicators and methods been established to measure success?	☐	☐	
Have clear monitoring procedures been established for tracking progress?	☐	☐	
Have evaluation standards and procedures been defined to assess the results?	☐	☐	
3. Are the goals of the planning process clearly defined? Are they defined as			
Specific	☐	☐	

Measurable	☐	☐	
Achievable	☐	☐	
Relevant	☐	☐	
Time-bound	☐	☐	

Annex 4. Action Plan Template

Goal 1:						
SO1.						
Measure 1.1.						
Activity	**Coordinator**	**Key partners**	**Indicators (KPIs)**	**Timeline**	**Monitoring frequency**	**Funding sources**
Measure 1.2.						
Activity	**Coordinator**	**Key partners**	**Indicators (KPIs)**	**Timeline**	**Monitoring frequency**	**Funding sources**
Measure 1.3.						
Activity	**Coordinator**	**Key partners**	**Indicators (KPIs)**	**Timeline**	**Monitoring frequency**	**Funding sources**

Annex 5. Monitoring template

Goal	Specific objective	Measure	Specific task/action	Coordinator	Deadline	KPIs	Implementation status	Notes

Annex 6. Suggested interview questions for evaluating the smart tourism village Action plan

Questions can be adapted depending on the stakeholder group (e.g. local authorities, business owners, tourism stakeholders, tourists, NGOs, citizens):

1. Relevance

- How well do you think the Action Plan reflects the actual needs and priorities of your community?
- Were you or your organization involved in the planning process? If yes, how would you describe the level of inclusiveness and transparency?
- Do you feel the objectives and measures defined in the plan were realistic and achievable?

2. Implementation

- How effectively have the planned activities been implemented so far?
- What challenges have you observed or experienced during implementation?
- Are you aware of any monitoring activities? Have findings been used to adjust actions?

3. Impact and Outcomes

- Have you observed any concrete changes or improvements since the implementation of the Smart Tourism Village Action Plan began?
- Which activities or initiatives do you consider the most successful?
- Are there areas where the plan has had little or no impact?

4. Sustainability

- Do you think the changes introduced are sustainable beyond the plan's timeframe?
- How do you assess the level of stakeholder engagement over time—has it increased, decreased, or remained the same?
- What would you improve in future planning cycles?

5. Lessons Learned and Future Steps

- What are the key lessons learned from the Smart Village planning and implementation process?
- Are there practices or approaches you believe should be scaled or replicated in other communities?
- What support (technical, financial, institutional) would you need to improve future outcomes?