

European project revitalises rural areas with smart innovation packages

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The EU-funded project SMART ERA, worth €6.5 million, aims to revitalise rural areas using smart innovation packages to combat depopulation.

A new project – [Smart Era](#) – has been launched to **empower rural communities which are facing socio-economic and environmental challenges**. Using **co-developed solutions** bundled into **“smart innovation packages**, the 4-year project fosters **a community-led pathway to change and covers technology, governance, business, societal aspects, and policy making**.

Rural areas are often perceived as **lagging behind**, facing **fewer services, structural issues, limited job opportunities**, and an **aging population**. The ongoing **digital revolution**, coupled with the **rise in remote and location-free work opportunities**, offers a **unique chance to redirect migration flows back to rural landscapes**.

In this respect, **the 25-strong Smart Era consortium from 10 countries** recognises the need for **strategic interventions and to capitalise on trends like multi-local living**. The aim is not only to address the challenges of the communities but also to **find innovative solutions together within the project**.

Project coordinator Matteo Gerosa from FBK states: “I am confident that the SMART ERA project will represent a significant step towards constructing more environmentally friendly, compact, sustainable, and innovative growth models in rural Europe. It will integrate technological solutions and social innovation to provide a strategic response to the challenges posed by depopulation, with the goal of reversing migration flows and igniting sustainable growth. I appreciate the opportunity to lead a remarkable and skilled team of 25 partners from 10 European countries, all dedicated to shaping intelligent and sustainable development in rural areas.”

The project will innovate at **six pilot sites**:

- Valle di Sole/Tesino (Italy),
- Tramuntana/Sóller (Spain),
- Northern Ostrobothnia (Finland),
- East Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Šmarje (Slovenia, Italy, Croatia)
- Devetaki Plateau (Bulgaria)

These sites will **work to enhance their communities' ability to address challenges, promoting cooperation** not only within their regions but also **in line with the EU macro-regional strategies.**

Lastly, SMART ERA will manage **two distinct open calls** – one for the **replication of its solutions in follower rural regions and another for third-party projects.** This will broaden the project's expertise and foster collaboration.



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