



Photo credit: Andrea Franceschini

European project revitalises rural areas with smart innovation packages

Trento, Italy – January 17-18, 2024: 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**



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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**:

- **Trentino (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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