



FUTURAL

Empowering the **FUT**ure through innovative Smart Solutions for **rUR**AL areas

From Smart Villages to Smart Rural Futures: policy pathways for scaling rural innovation

9 June 2026, ONLINE, 09:30-11:00 AM

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Organised by: Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL) in collaboration with FUTURAL partners



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Description

Across Europe, rural areas are actively testing new approaches to innovation, service delivery and community-led development through **Smart Villages and related initiatives**. These experiences show **strong potential to enhance resilience, competitiveness and quality of life**, but also reveal persistent challenges in moving from local experimentation to systemic and scalable change.

Building on ongoing research and policy analysis within the FUTURAL project¹, combined with practical experiences from across rural territories, a set of **recurring barriers** continue to limit the uptake and scaling of rural innovation. These include *fragmentation* between the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Cohesion Policy and digital and social policies; *short-term, project-based funding*; *administrative and regulatory complexity*; *weak coordination* across governance levels; and *insufficient capacities* and support structures. These constraints point to the **need for more enabling governance conditions** that better connect local initiatives with regional, national and EU-level policies, while supporting long-term innovation processes.

At the same time, **the European Union is entering a decisive phase** in shaping its [post-2027 EU policy framework](#). Ongoing discussions on the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the evolution of the CAP, and broader priorities such as competitiveness, resilience, simplification and territorial cohesion are complemented by strategic initiatives such as the [Vision for Agriculture and Food](#), and emerging policy debates around the “[Right to Stay](#)” Strategy. Together, these frameworks point to a growing recognition that **rural areas must be supported** as dynamic spaces for innovation, production and living.

In this evolving context, the **discussion is shifting** from “Smart Villages” as isolated initiatives towards a broader vision of “Smart Rural Futures”, where innovation is embedded in governance systems, policy design and multi-level cooperation, and contributes to sustainable food systems, economic diversification and social inclusion.

This policy session will bring together practitioners and policymakers to connect on-the-ground experience with current EU policy debates. It will explore how governance frameworks, coordination mechanisms and policy instruments can better support the scaling of rural innovation and contribute to more attractive, resilient and future-proof rural areas across Europe.

Objectives

This session aims to:

- Contribute evidence-based insights to **FUTURAL policy recommendations** and strengthen synergies across EU rural innovation initiatives.
- **Present and discuss key insights emerging from the discussions around smart rurality**, including challenges, enabling conditions and policy gaps identified across Smart Villages and rural innovation practices.

¹ FUTURAL previous policy analysis [Existing Policy and Governance frameworks for smart community-led innovation](#)

- Identify **key policy and governance factors** enabling the uptake of rural innovation in different territorial contexts.
- **Exchange experiences with sister projects** on policy learning, scaling pathways and interoperability opportunities.
- Contribute to the **validation of governance and policy proposals**, including aspects related to scaling, funding and cross-project policy instruments.

Agenda

Time (CET)	Session	Contributor
09:30	Welcome and introduction	Serafin Pazos-Vidal , Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)
09:35	FUTURAL project presentation	Ari Lomis , project manager, AUA
09:40	Keynote Enabling Smart Rural Futures: governance, innovation and the Right to Stay	Edina Ocsko , Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) Vice-Chair
09:55	Presentation What we learned so far in FUTURAL: turning local experience into policy insights	Brigida Marovelli , UNIPI María Alonso-Roldán , AEIDL
10:05	Roundtable discussion Policy and implementation insights <i>Moderated discussion bringing together experts from European initiatives working on rural innovation, Smart Villages and territorial development.</i>	Serafin Pazos-Vidal , AEIDL Matteo Gerosa , FBK, coordinator of SMART ERA Benedetta Cavalieri , UNIBO, RURACTIVE project coordination team
10:35	Interactive policy workshop Governance frameworks for Smart Rural Futures	AEIDL
10:55	Wrap-up and key policy messages	Serafin Pazos-Vidal , AEIDL