

Title: **Primary social and health care networks in rural communities – strengthening the countryside**

Topic: **Smart and Sustainable Regions**

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Background

European nations encounter an increasingly aging population which also leads to reduction of care professionals. Rural areas are especially affected with a lack of formal social and health care resources, longer driving times to hospitals or social work institutions such as psychosocial counseling centers. In the socialwork field the result frequently is exclusion of services and chronification of problems. Clients sometimes have to somatize their problem in order to get some type of (medical) help. All these factors enhance allocation problems, especially unnecessary hospital admissions which lead to high costs. For the very elderly people, it risks triggering confusion and deprivation. Overall, it also increases rural depopulation with many other negative societal and ecological consequences.

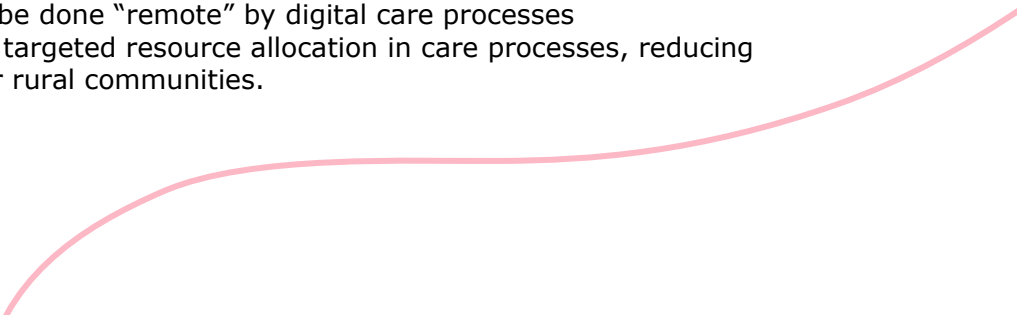
Research Questions

1. How can local communities be supported to identify their strengths, their informal family and neighborhood support networks?
2. How can local cultural and sport associations, churches, charities and volunteer organizations be integrated and linked to care processes?
3. To what extent could social work and its methods - such as capacity building and community organizing – contribute to strengthening and interlinking with the networks needed?
4. How can primary care (e.g. medical, social work, nursing) structures be maintained in rural regions, especially in E³UDRES² partner regions? Which aspects of digitalized care are needed?
5. How can a common or dual degree master program “community care in rural areas” be implemented and rolled out by E³UDRES² universities?

Methods

- Analysis of international community care and community network models especially in rural settings
- comparison of best practice models in the context of culture and financial sustainability
- mixed methods research: with qualitative and quantitative analysis; interviews with experts and stakeholders
- participatory action research: integration of citizens in all steps of the process

Expected results

- Development of roadmaps to strengthen available resources in rural communities
 - Design curricula for community workers, ideally a common master degree program
 - Identification which formal social, medical and nursing structures are needed on site and in person, and which could be done “remote” by digital care processes
 - Overall, increasing a better targeted resource allocation in care processes, reducing hospital costs and empower rural communities.
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Literature:

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