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VILLAGE HOSTS



Co-funded by
the European Union

Village Hosts: the Manifesto



The project

Village Hosting is a movement of new professional figures who have the potential to regenerate neglected European territories, preventing them from decaying by nourishing rural communities and restoring their ecosystems. They are pioneers with a deep connection to a place and the vision of forging new social and cultural systems that eradicate neo-liberal individualism and resource depletion to benefit the entire community. They are collaborative practitioners who are able to engage diverse stakeholders from the neighbourhood to the government level.

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The opportunity

Dissatisfaction with gentrified urban centres and mainstream activities started this trend even

before the COVID-19 crisis, which increased it further. But new projects, new livelihoods, new connections are sprouting up among Europe's multitude of small villages.



Mission

The mission of Village Hosts is to enhance the wellbeing of residents and ecosystems. Village Hosts

empower communities and foster active participation in decision-making processes that shape their lives



Lived stories of pioneering Village Hosts

Village Hosts can be the roots of our weakened rural

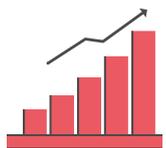
soils and communities, regenerating economies, protecting ecosystems and strengthening communities.



The Village Hosts: new professional figure

Village Hosts seek out and connect assets that may

already exist in a community – but are unknown or isolated: people, places, buildings, and skills.



The impact of Village Hosts

A Village Host's role will impact the local ecosystem by creating a more

equitable, sustainable, thriving rural environment. Including economic development, cultural preservation and community empowerment.



Collaboration within the local ecosystem

The Hosts will bring interventions into the

existing ecosystem, initiating activities, motivating others, suggesting ideas and solutions, taking leadership or managing positions.



Spread of the Village Hosts seeds

The Village Hosts can galvanise support and

create collective efforts to address the needs of their community. Every village has the power to make a difference by recognising their potential and joining hands with others.



Implement a Village Host in your community

Village Hosting initiatives often spring from

individual actions, yet they inevitably expand to local physical communities and connect with the global online communities.

Picture of Grottole (Italy) seen from the other side of the canyon. The photo was taken during the European Training held in this Italian village in May 2023.



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O The opportunity

Many remote rural regions have endured decades-long crises, marked by declining economic prospects, emigration, insufficient services, deteriorating infrastructure, and a sense of being left behind. In Italy alone, 5,000 small villages (those with 5,000 or fewer inhabitants) have been declining; in Spain, 3,500; in Serbia, 4,700 – to name just three countries as examples.

In these areas, right across Europe - where services, infrastructures and opportunities are lacking - people continue to move to urban areas. When they do so, local ecological knowledge is often lost, and fewer people are left to care for the land and its biodiversity. Simultaneously, a growing number of urban residents contemplated leaving cities, seeking refuge, or even moving to rural areas.

Village Hosts embody a blend of nature and creativity, rural culture and history and innovative thinking

Dissatisfaction with increasingly gentrified urban centres and mainstream activities started this trend even before the COVID-19 crisis, which increased it further. But new projects, new livelihoods, new connections are sprouting up among Europe's multitude of small villages.

Amid these disparate challenges, a convergence emerged through a rising phenomenon: social innovation hosting initiatives known as Village Hosts. Many of them began to develop new activities, such as positive-impact tourism, nature reconnection, ecological restoration, adventure sports, farm-shares, learning journeys, wellness retreats, heritage trails, and more.

These initiatives, characterised by informal grassroots designs, connect and experiment with novel economic and social models, bridging urban and rural areas: Village Hosts are individuals who transitioned from urban to rural settings or migrated from rural to urban and now return. Village Hosts embody a blend of those two worlds, nature and creativity, rural culture and history and innovative thinking.



A group picture of the partners of the project taken during the European Training held in Grottole (Italy), May 2023

Mission

Village Hosts' purpose is to enable positive transformation in rural communities. Their mission is to enhance the wellbeing of residents and ecosystems. Village Hosts empower communities, and foster active participation in decision-making processes that shape their lives.

Village Hosts work diligently to effect positive change by crafting equitable, sustainable, and flourishing rural environments

Equipped with tools and strategies for advocating rights, engaging communities, developing social entrepreneurship, addressing rural development, social justice, environmental concerns, and cultural experiences, Village Hosts work diligently to effect positive change by crafting equitable, sustainable, and flourishing rural environments.

Village Hosts boast rural creativity and growth potential while promoting cultural preservation, revival, inclusivity and social cohesion in villages.

Lived stories of pioneering Village Hosts

Village Hosts act in different contexts, territories and communities. They work on diverse projects. Village Hosts can be the roots of our weakened rural soils and communities, regenerating economies, protecting ecosystems and strengthening communities. Village Hosting is a role and professional figure we have yet to see in our governments officially; however, it is a role that needs so much more recognition and investment.



SELENA JOVANOVIC

Selena, for example, is a network connector who lives in the Kukavica Mountain in Serbia. Her area suffers from depopulation and poverty. However, she dared to envision a different future for this place. She knows that the land is rich with natural resources and ancient knowledge with the potential to be rediscovered by local people. She now involves local households in the restoration of traditional clay, stone and wood buildings. The community has revived an old watermill and transformed it into a food lab. Selena also helps families grow organic food to sell at local markets.



IEVA ZEMĪTE

Village Hosts also play a vital role as Ieva Zemīte, for example, she has spent thirty years restoring an abandoned manor house in rural Latvia and bringing it back to life. It is located next to a beautiful swamp and biosphere reserve, so one of Ieva's next projects is to build a nature path for use by a new generation of nature-loving visitors. She now hosts experts-led biosphere tours, slow food banquets in which local produce is served, encounters with Ieva's flock of traditional black faced sheep – and their shepherd – and chamber music concerts in this spectacular location.

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V The **illage Hosts: a new professional figure**

Village Hosts seek out and connect assets that may already exist in a community – but are unknown or isolated: people, places, buildings, and skills. They are collaboration experts that connect these neglected assets in events, services and enterprises, often in new combinations of people and places.

These new services and livelihoods often involve new combinations of people and places creating and offering hospitable spaces and collaborative activities, fostering positive social impact by welcoming urban visitors to rural landscapes.

Multiple categories of Village Hosting initiatives are emerging, encompassing Art Residences, Makerspaces, Co-working, Co-living, Sustainable Tourism, Agriculture, Crafts, and Digital Nomadism.

Village Hosts especially make it possible for diverse partners and stakeholders to work together – often for the first time

Village Hosting encompasses a broad spectrum of roles and activities such as crafting, managing and delivering such services through envisioning and mapping opportunities, identifying key actors and resources, weaving narratives around locales, prototyping services, curating experiences, aligning with cooperative platforms, and designing innovative business models.



Some of the participants to the European Village Hosts Training, held in May 2023, while they present their projects

Village Hosts especially make it possible for diverse partners and stakeholders to work together – often for the first time. This connecting work demands special skills: hosting, convening, facilitating, animating, and coordinating.

Furthermore, Village Hosts engage in specific roles related to their local communities and the broader Village Hosts community:

- Cultivating enduring relationships with local people
- Engaging with individuals and organisations
- Facilitating community and civic engagement
- Outsourcing and delegating responsibilities

Village Hosts all share a vision; they can see beyond the present

Though currently an informal and emerging phenomenon, Village Hosts aspire to formal recognition as a social entrepreneurial vocation with specific skills and roots within a particular community. They are all animated by a sense of responsibility from within, a passionate promise towards a land they choose to take care of.

Village Hosts all share a vision; they can see beyond the present, reconciling the past and future of a place and can see its potential. Patience is a key virtue in rural contexts.



Barrea, Italian village in the Region of Abruzzo

The Impact of Village Hosts

A village host's role could impact the local ecosystem by creating a more equitable, sustainable, thriving rural environment. Village Hosts usually focus on a selection of specific actors (stakeholders) that may include one or more members of groups, for the most part local, such as:

- Farmers and agricultural producers
- Local residents, businesses and government
- Community organisations
- Landowners and property developers
- Environmental and conservation groups
- Tourism organisations
- Educational and healthcare institutions
- Infrastructure providers
- Indigenous communities
- Local arts and cultural groups
- Emergency services and more

Usually, Village Hosts aim to directly impact one or only a few specific groups of stakeholders while indirectly impacting some others. Therefore, Village Hosts should foresee and acknowledge their actions' potential positive and negative consequences.

Whether intended or not, their decisions' potential direct and indirect impact should be considered a great opportunity and a great responsibility towards the local ecosystem.

The potential positive impact of Village Hosts' actions may include community empowerment, social innovation, economic development, increased environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, improved local services, capacity building, and enhanced quality of life (perceived and actual).



Part of the collective work of the partners for co-creating the handbook of the Open School for Village Hosts

Village Hosts should clarify measurable goals or milestones before taking action [...] to track the progress towards the desired change

The potential negative impact of Village Hosts may include conflict and division, gentrification, dependency on a single activist or leader, cultural shifts negative for stakeholders, exclusion (also unintentional), resource strain with a rapid influx of tourists or other external actors as well as other intended or unintended negative consequences.

Taking the above variety of stakeholders and the potential positive and negative impacts, Village Hosts should clarify measurable goals or milestones before taking action. They should state (ideally, with the stakeholders' participation) the expected positive and negative impacts, mark the impacted area's current state, and set measurements to track the progress towards the desired change.

Collaboration within the local ecosystem

Village Hosts play a crucial role in how different ecosystem actors (stakeholders) might collaborate to achieve intended common and individual goals. The Village Host's role will bring interventions into the existing ecosystem, most often involving: initiating activities, motivating others, suggesting ideas and solutions, taking leadership or management positions, and more. To succeed, Village Hosts must address the topic of responsibility and ownership among all stakeholders and include it in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages. Following the guidelines below may help in building fundamentals for synergic collaboration within the local ecosystem:

1 Create a **Shared Vision** to develop an alignment between stakeholders for the collective impact, prioritising holistic, lasting community outcomes.

2 Establish **Cross-Sector Collaboration** to foster cooperation among local actors (stakeholders) leveraging their strengths for comprehensive, sustainable solutions.

3 Establish **Collaborative Governance** structures to engage diverse stakeholders, facilitating inclusive decision-making considering multiple perspectives.

4 Establish **Guiding Principles** to highlight community values, such as inclusivity, transparency, equity, and sustainability, that might become core principles to steer collaborative efforts towards common goals.

5 Use **Continuous Learning and Knowledge Exchange** principles to cultivate ongoing learning and capacity-building among stakeholders, supporting adaptable approaches that harness shared expertise and experiences.

6 Use the **Systems Thinking** approach to create projects and other activities as a conscious intervention into an existing ecosystem. Adopting a systemic approach helps foresee the project's impact and recognise the interconnectedness of various stakeholders and their roles in creating sustainable change within the community.



Cooking class in Grottole, Italy



People on a field visit to one of the Villages involved in Open School for Village Hosts



Panoramic view from the historic centre of Grottole Village in Italy

Spread the Village Hosts seeds

Through collective movement, Village Hosts can galvanise support and create joint efforts to address the needs of their community. Every village has the power to make a difference by recognising their potential and joining hands with others. By synergising social innovation strategies and engaging relevant stakeholders, Village Hosts can draw attention to the necessary assistance for revitalising their dear rural areas.

Engaging with local communities, expressing their cause through artistic means, and sharing empowering stories are potent tools to motivate others to become part of the Village Host movement. Fueled by passion and unwavering dedication, they can kindle a beacon of hope within many hearts. They can orchestrate a transformative movement with fellow Village Hosts that garners support and uplifts lives.

The present actions of Village Hosts will sculpt a brighter future for all, for they are the catalysts of change within their communities, exemplifying consistency, compassion, and resilience. At the core of every Village Host's journey lies this message:

1. Be brave
2. Be open-minded
3. Befriend curiosity
4. Seek help when needed
5. Help others
6. Share your story
7. Build bonds and friendships
8. Seek commonalities, not differences
9. Be responsible towards your community
10. Take responsibility for your actions
11. Imagine the future with an open heart
12. Embrace and savour what you have

Action plan to implement a Village Host movement in your community

Village Hosting initiatives often spring from individual actions, yet they inevitably expand to local physical communities and connect with the global online communities. The journey below is one of many examples of how you can join and interact with the Village Host community:

1

Read inspiring stories about Village Hosts: <https://www.villagehosts.eu/stories/>

2

Join the community by creating an account on the OSVH platform: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/>

3

Go to the Map page to explore the OSVH platform Map and discover Village Hosting initiatives nearby you: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/map/>

4

Start a conversation with them or connect with other Village Hosts in the Community section of the platform, they can help you develop your initiative: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/members/>

5

Check the Resources, online Training sessions or material on the platform to learn more about developing your initiative: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/download/>

6

Download the OSVH Handbook in the Resources section for more detailed resources about village hosts, tools and how to launch new initiatives: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/download/>

7

Download the OSVH Toolbox in the Resources section to support co-designing your initiative with the local and global community: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/download/>

8

Create your Village Host profile in the Map so other initiatives and guests can find you: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/add-a-village-host-place/>

9

Share updates about your initiatives in the Activity section: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/activity/> or discuss them in the Forums section: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/forums/>

10

Discuss how to improve the OSVH platform and the Village Hosts movement in the Forums section: <https://platform.villagehosts.eu/forums/forum/the-osvh-digital-platform/>



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Our project partners:

