

RURACTIVE OPEN CALL - CHALLENGE 30

Title of the challenge	Revitalisation of the village centre: creation of common indoor and outdoor meeting places
Dynamo (pilot location)	Törbel-Moosalpregion, Switzerland
RDD (Rural Development Driver) <i>addressed by the challenge</i>	Local services, health and wellbeing / Culture and cultural innovation
Overall context description and specific context to be addressed by the challenge	<p>Törbel is a traditional Swiss mountain village in the canton of Valais with around 500 residents. The village is characterised by centuries-old, sun-scorched wooden houses built in narrow alleyways and is therefore included in the Swiss Inventory of Cultural Property of National Significance. The association “Urchigs Terbil,” founded in 1985, is committed to preserving the traditional village appearance and the old agricultural buildings.</p> <p>However, the historic buildings in the old village centre are rarely used today or serve as holiday homes, which encourages new constructions in the outer parts of the village. The renovation and restoration of these traditional wooden houses is difficult, as they are often too low and dark for modern living standards, and the Swiss conservation regulations further complicate renovations. As the old village square was lost when the road was built, there is no longer a central gathering place for the community, contributing to the perception of a lifeless village centre. The village shop, which also houses the post office and tourist information, serves as an important meeting place for residents. Unfortunately, it is under economic pressure due to more attractive offerings in the valley. The absence of public meeting places makes informal community interactions difficult, which are vital for maintaining traditions (like the unique tradition of managing the Commons, which were studied in Törbel by Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom).</p>
Scope of the Challenge	The challenge is to revitalise the old village centre of Törbel and increase its attractiveness as a primary residence. The focus is on finding sustainable solutions to create common indoor and outdoor meeting places as well as a programme of activities that are accessible to all and can be managed in the spirit of the Commons traditions.

	<p>These solutions include repurposing empty traditional buildings for community use, promoting cultural activities to drive the revitalisation of the old village centre, and maintaining the village shop, which serves as a central location for local services and community activities. A key aspect is the balance between revitalising the centre and preserving the traditional wooden houses that characterise the village.</p> <p>Constraints to be considered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the limited space available in the village centre • the need to maintain existing pathways and ensure that they remain accessible for (agricultural) machinery
Solution requirements	<p>This challenge seeks innovative solutions that can revitalise the old village centre and create opportunities for community interaction. The solutions should aim to transform the village centre into a vibrant hub for both residents and visitors and ensure that the village shop is maintained.</p> <p>The proposed solutions could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inclusive design-based approaches, with furniture modules and installations for indoor and outdoor areas that are multifunctional, easy to move and accessible to all • innovatively designed landscaping and lighting elements, as well as ecologically valuable mobile or permanent green spaces, all without fundamentally changing the existing infrastructure and in keeping with the traditional character of Törbel. • Programmes for the activation and management of the common spaces (as promoted by E. Ostrom), both indoor and outdoor, including the use of digital platforms for communication and reservations. <p>Nature-based, low cost and modular solutions are highly encouraged. The design of these solutions should thoughtfully integrate biodiversity and landscape features, ensuring a harmonious relationship with the environment. Additionally, climate adaptation and mitigation strategies must be considered to promote sustainability and resilience.</p> <p>The solution should be easy to use and intuitive, ensure open access, and utilise open data sources.</p>

Specific objectives and expected outcomes

- **Revitalisation of the old village centre:** creating a vibrant and attractive meeting place for locals and visitors to promote social interaction and a sense of community.
- **Integration of empty houses:** utilising the empty traditional houses for community activities and events to ensure their preservation and emphasise their significance to the village community.
- **Creation of community-shared meeting places:** attractive, sustainable design of indoor and outdoor areas that are accessible to all and promote the use in the spirit of the “Commons” tradition.
- **Strengthening the village shop:** promoting the village shop as a central place for local services and community activities to ensure its economic viability.

Available resources

- Land use plan
- Land register of houses
- Collaboration with and support from the local Municipality for events and installation in public spaces
- Collaboration with local stakeholders and the community

Illustration

The old village centre in Törbel with its traditional wooden houses
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