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GOVQoL

## **Activity 1.1.: Setting the scene - preparation of position paper on QoL as relevant Alpine local governance topic**

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENT**





**Title: Activity 1.1 Setting the scene - preparation of position paper on QoL as relevant Alpine local governance topic – BACKGROUND DOCUMENT**

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**This project is co-funded by the European Union through the Interreg Alpine Space programme.**

Ljubljana, September 2025



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Why this position paper

The position paper is the first GOVQoL input to lay the ground for the project work. The paper is necessary due to the ambiguous nature of the concept of quality of life, both as research and as a policy topic. More to that, the previous studies in the Alpine area have shown there is no common understanding of the phenomenon (Marot et al., 2023), and, usually, a discourse debate is initiated at the beginning of each study or project, followed by a deliberation of a concise understanding of an otherwise vague concept. The paper was also identified as a tool to increase the local awareness about quality of life, both for the policy makers and for the local population, and initiate preparedness to integrate this concept into the policy processes.

One of the existing studies on governance of quality of life and its conclusion that “*life satisfaction is one of the most important factors determining voters’ choices, and one extra deviation of life satisfaction can create 6% points of the vote*” (Layard, 2021) certainly offers a signal that the topic should be addressed on the local level and by public administration. Thus, the paper aims at supporting Alpine local actors in evaluating the quality of life within their own communities. Furthermore, the local administration should more actively invite the citizens to join the policy-making process or elections, and this paper can offer arguments for why this would be necessary and beneficial. Although quality of life might be considered a soft concept such as “circular value chains”, it should be put on the local governance agenda due to the fact that the local level is the level where policies are implemented. More to that, the local level is also the level on which, the subjective perception of quality of life (shorter QoL) can be most impacted by the governance.

As analysed in the 10<sup>th</sup> Report on the State of the Alps (shorter RSA 10), the Alpine area on one side offers a very good living environment and conditions that people find very satisfactory, but, on the other side, also faces multiple challenges that might be more problematic than in other, non-mountainous regions (Marot et al., 2025). Among such challenges are the public transport, provision of services of general interest, depopulation of remote areas, dependency on tourism, impacts of climate change and other, that all can significantly contribute to the decrease or dissatisfaction with the quality of life. Thus, the quality of life and its governance are a legitimate concern for Alpine local communities, and for other Alpine stakeholders as well, and should be inspected more into detail.

## 1.2 The target audience

The position paper is first, and foremost, targeting the local communities in the Alpine region, more precisely, the local policy and decision makers, such as local civil servants and elected representatives. They are in charge of initiating and preparing the local policies, including the development strategies, sectoral strategies, spatial plans and other documents, relevant to improving/impacting the quality of life. Added to those are the local policy implementors and service providers, including the civil servants and technicians in charge of implementing the policies and the measures on the ground. On the local level, the voluntary networks and non-governmental organisations that represent various interests of the citizens and interest groups might be interested in the topic, as will the citizens themselves to whom this topic is close.

On the upper governance level, there are various stakeholders who might show interest in the position paper. Such are the representatives of the regional administration and development who can inquire information about what the local governance is doing regarding the quality of life, and what the regional level should also be potentially concerned with. More to that, on the regional level there are other stakeholders like regional or national parks, local action groups or other non-governmental or interest groups which concern themselves as well with the topic of quality of life.

On the national level, the main target audience is the representatives of the national ministries, either responsible for spatial planning or otherwise, the ministries responsible for the sectors concerned with the quality of life, like health, economy, education and others. More to that, there are national agencies, bodies and interest groups as well.

Above the national level is the Alpine supranational context. On this level, there are multiple institutions and organisations which are related to the topic of quality of life as well. Among those are EUSALP – the European macroregional strategy for the Alpine area with its action groups (shorter AG), and the Alpine Convention with its protocols in which the topic quality of life is the bases of living in the Alps. The EUSALP AG's to which the topic might apply, are for the examples of AG 4 mobility, AG 1 research & innovation and AG 8 Risk, and the topic could be as well understood as a horizontal topic. On the supranational level, there are also multiple non-governmental or interest organisation which are active in supporting different aspects of quality of life, like CIPRA, Mountain Research Initiative and others. Of special concern are the ones directly engaged with the local communities, such as Alliance in the Alps or the Alpine Town of the Year.

### 1.3 How to read and use this policy paper

The position paper's content starts with the presentation of the quality-of-life concepts, reasoning and importance of the topic. Our basic presumption is that we aim for the good quality of life, so positive changes and trends that contribute to it. Then the current governance contribution to quality of life in the Alpine area is elaborated on, based on the existing resources and the research up to date. In this regard, the paper also provides the evidence of what is already available on the local level in terms of policies and how the local governance of quality of life currently works. As a conclusion of the third chapter, the existing monitoring efforts on the local level are elaborated. The fourth section delves into the core of the project's topic, namely the role of the local communities in governing quality of life. As conclusion, the challenges of the local governance of quality of life are listed and described.

The policy paper rests on existing studies and knowledge in the Alpine area, available up to March 2025 since the GOVQoL has so far not created its own knowledge. The exception is the input from the stakeholders, gathered during the on-line kick off (April, 9<sup>th</sup> 2025), which elaborates on the quality-of-life topics, relevant to cover on the local level, the information about the stakeholders, and the good practices which exist already in different local communities, all with the intention to improve the QoL of the Alpine people.

## 2 The concept of quality of life

The quality of life has been (re)gaining attention and importance in the last 15 years or so. This is visible in multiple platforms the European countries' governments have established, including the Eurostat quality of life portal. These platforms have multiple functions, among which figure increasing awareness on the topic, defining the concept, and in some cases, establishing the monitoring approaches. Starting the discussion on the topic, the most common statement, and also a conclusion of the GOVQoL stakeholders' discussion is that the concept is complex and vague, and usually has as many definitions as there are people discussing it. The RSA 10 shows that also the terms used to name it, are not unified across the Alpine countries since various versions are used thereby: "quality of life" is predominantly used in Austria and Slovenia, while Switzerland and Liechtenstein are keener on "well-being" and "welfare" equivalents in the German language (Marot et al., 2024).

Researchers on quality of life have identified more than 100 definitions and models of quality of life (e.g. Schallock, 1996), and the conclusion of inspecting these definitions is that this is a multidimensional concept covering many aspects of people's lives and living conditions. Another common characteristic of the concept is that it can be observed from two perspectives, the objective depiction of the present living conditions (the living environment), and the subjective perception of people living in the area. The latter is usually measured with a survey focused on satisfaction with quality of life and its aspects. As González, Cárcaba & Ventura (2011) have argued, this subjective perception and intangible factors such as personal emotions and attitudes towards life are not to be neglected, and should be inspected when quality of life is in question.

The subjective perception of quality of life also relates to what is considered as a good quality life. What is good, can be either seen through the eyes of the individual, and their life satisfaction, happiness, feeling of well-being (Dissart & Deller, 2000), or via the common societal goals such as the sustainable development goals, shorter SDGs. The latter are the global agreement and intention to steer the development in the way that secures good quality of life for people no matter where they live (quote UN). The SDGs most closely related to QoL are the following ones: 4 Quality education, 11 Sustainable cities and communities, 15 Life on land, and other. To the topic of governance, the last, 17<sup>th</sup> goal "Partnerships for the goals" relates most to.

More to that, how good the quality of life is, relates to the existing living conditions and their evaluation in specific local concepts. Building on the SDGs and the planetary boundaries concept (resource), "the donut theory" was developed by Kate Raworth. Raworth (2018) initially noted that the planetary boundaries concept does not take human wellbeing into account. She suggested social boundaries should be combined with the planetary boundaries structure by adding measures such as jobs, education, food, access to water, health services and energy (tightly related to the SDGs). Within planetary limits and an equitable social foundation lies a doughnut-shaped area which is the area where there is a "safe and just space for humanity to thrive in". Alpine cities such as Grenoble (France) have started using that model for their strategic planning.

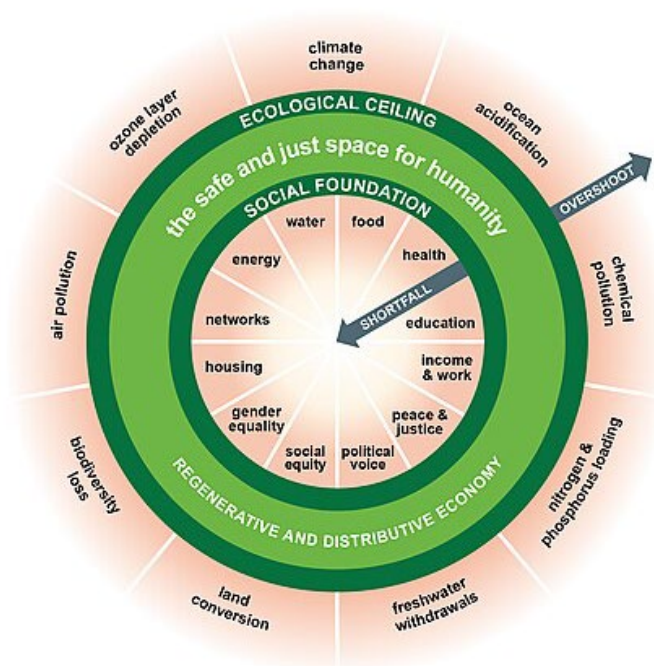


Figure 1: A donut theory as one of the options to present quality of life concept. (Source: Wikipedia, 2025)

What is also common to various concepts of quality of life, is that they depict topics of QoL they describe or evaluate more into detail. For example, the EUROSTAT concept chooses eight topics (overall experience of life, material living conditions, productivity or main activity, education, health, leisure and social interactions, economic and physical safety, governance and basic rights, and natural and living environment; EUROSTAT, 2025), while in the RSA 10 the stakeholders identified five topics as the most relevant for the Alpine territory which were then described more into detail with the subtopics (see the table below). Those are: environment, infrastructure and services, work and financial security, social relations, and governance. As the ESPON Territorial Quality of Life studies show the quality-of-life topics do not necessarily need to be prefixed, but instead, can be identified in the policy making or planning process (ESPON, 2020). Within these ESPON studies living labs, and also, further on in the GOVQoL project work with the local communities, the topics are going to be determined by the local communities themselves based on deliberation of the stakeholders.

Table 1: The topics and the subtopics of QoL as recognised relevant for the Alpine areas. (Source: Marot et al., 2025)

Measurement framework of Quality of life	Good life enablers
ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environment</li> <li>- Ecosystems and biodiversity</li> <li>- Built environment</li> <li>- Conservation and protection</li> <li>- Resilience and climate change adaptation</li> </ul>
INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- Connectivity</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public services</li> <li>- Leisure and cultural activities</li> <li>- Commercial services</li> </ul>
GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public policies and legislative processes</li> <li>- Enabling, prosperous and sustainable future</li> <li>- Inclusion and participation</li> </ul>
WORK AND FINANCIAL SECURITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job opportunities</li> <li>- Work conditions</li> <li>- Social security</li> <li>- Innovation capacity and support for economic transition</li> </ul>
SOCIAL RELATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Solidarity, intragenerational and inclusive care</li> <li>- Community activities and events</li> <li>- Safety</li> </ul>

During the on-line meeting of the GOVQoL stakeholders, the following topics have been brought forward as of relevance to the local communities:

- (1) Access to services of general interest in remote and rural areas
- (2) Quality of infrastructure, including road infrastructure and internet connectivity
- (3) Public transport, especially for the elderly and the youth, and high dependency on the car mobility
- (4) Affordable access to housing and opportunities for the long-term rental
- (5) Economic dependency on tourism
- (6) Employment opportunities
- (7) Balance between climate change adaptation, agricultural activity, and wildlife protection
- (8) Need for high-quality leisure activities
- (9) Available places for both, informal and formal socializing
- (10) Public participation in policy making and enabling democracy

Regarding the topic of governance and policy making, projects that focus on developing networks between towns and villages were considered necessary. A key question raised was how to encourage the local public to become more active and interested in participating and co-creating local policies, initiatives, and projects, which GOVQoL is aiming at. More to that, it was also emphasized that in the Alps the heterogeneity within various types of areas (e.g., rural, tourist, and urban areas) should be taken into account while considering quality of life. Besides the territorial aspect, the topics of quality of life also differentiate based on the different target groups. In the Erasmus+ Alpine Compass project, youth has exposed the following three issues: nature conservation, access to work and working conditions, and a good public transport (Čalaković et al., 2024).

### 3 Governance and quality of life: theoretical insights

Governance refers to the ways organizations and societies make important decisions, involving stakeholders in those processes while ensuring accountability and building trust (UNDP, 1997). Several key actors contribute to this process: government, business sectors, civil society, and citizens. Governments are the main bodies that are in charge of governance, having the authority to establish legal frameworks and enforce rules. Also, governance can interplay at different levels that span from supranational to local (UNDP, 1997; Graham, Amos, and Plumptre, 2003).

In governmental processes, public and private bodies from the business sector play a vital role in economic development by providing financial support. In these processes, civil society, in turn, plays a crucial role in representing citizens in decision-making and implementation processes, facilitating participation, and enhancing governance accountability by monitoring the activities. Most importantly, as being the main components of societies, citizens have a responsibility to engage in the democratic processes to influence governance. Local authorities are the key components of the governmental systems being in direct interaction with the citizens, and providing services, managing resources, and implementing policies that directly affect the daily lives of citizens. They also foster community engagement through participatory processes to address communities' specific needs (Graham, Amos, and Plumptre, 2003). Despite their crucial role in the governmental system and direct connection with local communities, there is a limited number of research focuses on the relationship between local governments and their impacts on the QoL (Atkinson and Joyce, 2010; Gonzalez, Càrcaba, and Ventura, 2011; Càrcaba, Arrondo and González, 2022).

#### 3.1 Well-being and Governance

There is a strong relationship between governance and individual well-being that local governments' actions can address. At the individual level, the discussion about well-being goes further than objective assessment and reaches subjective accounts of well-being. The debate over the dominance of economic growth versus the importance of social infrastructure in QoL discourse remains ongoing (Kroll and Delhey, 2013; Allardt, 1993; Zapf, 2000 as cited in Self, 2015). Although existing literature proves a strong correlation between economic indicators and QoL, the relationship between non-economic indicators and their impact on QoL is significant (Lee, 2021; Doumpos et al., 2020). Over time, the indicators to measure QoL have evolved in such a way that economic, environmental, and social aspects are included, and can be measured on several levels – from individual and family to local, regional, state, or country (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Lee, 2021).

The research conducted by Ward in 2020 (as cited in Layard, 2021) showed that life satisfaction is one of the most important factors determining voters' choices: one extra standard deviation of life satisfaction can result 6 percentage point increase in votes, while, economic growth affects only 3 percentage of people's choices (Layard, 2021). While economic policies are largely shaped at the national level, critical sectors such as health and environment are more directly addressed at the local level governance (Atkinson and Joyce, 2010). Given local governments' proximity to

residents, municipalities and local governments directly and indirectly influence the QoL of their inhabitants (Siedlecka, 2015).

Importance of the social infrastructure for services of general interest that provide a better social environment, such as health services, both mental and physical, child development, family life, and elderly care, was also exposed by Layard (2021) stating that these services contribute more significantly to life satisfaction than economic growth alone. As the public institutions responsible for delivering these services, local authorities have become increasingly important. One of their key responsibilities is to create environments that promote sustainable development and enhance the well-being and welfare of citizens (Douplos et al., 2020). Given that governmental institutions deliver most of the key components tied to individual well-being (Schalock, 1996), local governance holds its importance as being the *provider* for the factors that influence QoL, even as the concepts remain dynamic and context dependent.

However, one needs to mention that in regards to the services of general interest, there are also other types of provision developing and applied, besides the public one. Multiple studies have been performed to analyse various types of models and also private forms of delivering the services (Gløersen et al., 2016), some specifically for the Alps (Kolarič et al., 2017) or sparsely populated rural areas (Pearce, Ayres and Tricker, 2005; Arcelus et al., 2015). Such areas are specifically under pressure due to population loss and closure of services, and, thus, need to look for new solutions. These areas European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies). The research of Kolaric et al. (2018) performed in the frame of the Interreg INTESTI project has shown that the Alpine countries do not have that many tailored policies targeting specifically services. Besides policies, also standards were considered depicting the maximum distance that inhabitants are willing to overcome to reach specific service. Only Switzerland was outed as one of the countries with exact standard for post offices, otherwise the access of services is not regulated, and remains one of the crucial topics to be addressed by the governance in the future.

### *Challenges of Local Governance of Quality of Life*

However, the challenge for the local governments lies in addressing both the objective and subjective well-being of the individuals and communities at the same time. The interaction between these two dimensions of well-being matters because people's lived experiences often diverge from what objective assessment might suggest; objective indicators only tell a part of the story about the life satisfaction of people, and this situation hampers the policy-making processes through neglecting subjective realities (Veenhoven, 2001 as cited in Self, 2015).

Additionally, in addressing both types of well-being, the distinction between *needs* and *wants* becomes relevant. Social policies are designed to meet the essential needs of communities, such as housing or education. However, some of the services like recreational opportunities can also be considered by local governments as *non-essential needs*, although they can enhance subjective well-being. McGregor and colleagues (2009) discuss what societies *want* that can help satisfy local communities' desire to have better lives. While the *needs* are prioritized in the social spending, *wants* are being addressed when there are extra resources (McGregor, Camfield, Woodcock, 2009). Therefore, that can be said that *needs* contribute to the objective well-being of the communities, *wants* serve to help enhance subjective well-being. Moreover, when people have freedom to choose what they *want* to live their lives, their life satisfaction is also levitating. Research shows that when individuals are given choices and a sense of control, their life satisfaction tends to rise.

Governmental authorities, especially at the local levels, support this by delivering a wide range of services and creating opportunities that offer people various alternatives and greater control over their lives, ultimately enhancing their life satisfaction (Atkinson and Joyce, 2010).

In times of the governmental austerity, there is often a discussion about what services and to what extent should be provided by the local communities, and which should be left to the market. The extent of the services that local community can provide depends often on the prosperity of the local community itself, and the money they can channel into services' provisions. The UK government has published multiple documents that steer or guide the local communities in what services they should provide for their inhabitants. Among those Local Governance Associations has published document "Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils" which states that councils provide over 800 services to their communities. As already argued, there is a distinction between mandatory and discretionary services. Among mandatory the following are listed:

- education services;
- children's and adults' social care;
- waste collection;
- public health services;
- planning and housing services;
- road maintenance; and
- library services (House of Lords, 2019).

In other countries obligatory services are usually depicted in the self-government legislation. Though these services are listed, the detailed guidance and standards are not necessarily provided. It is usually also not stated if the size of the settlement conditions the number and scale of the services provided. Of interest to our project and further work with local communities, is also the table foreseen the role of the towns and settlements in supplying the local population

*Table 2: Potential tasks and activities of the local communities. (Source: Local Government Association, 2021)*

TOPIC	ACTIVITIES
<b>Influence and respond</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comment on planning applications.</li> <li>- Respond to principal authority consultations.</li> <li>- Representing the town or parish at area boards.</li> <li>- Influence service levels of principal authority contracts that affect their areas (e.g. grass cutting).</li> </ul>
<b>Place-shaping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neighbourhood planning.</li> <li>- Affordable housing.</li> <li>- Running local events.</li> <li>- Encouraging local commercial activity, e.g. pop up cafes at community events or seasonally.</li> <li>- Vision for local parks, land and buildings.</li> <li>- Community shops.</li> <li>- Community centres.</li> </ul>

<b>Community activation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-ordinating volunteers.</li> <li>- Support to community action (as in COVID-19 pandemic) and community support.</li> <li>- Befriending services.</li> <li>- Grant and fundraising e.g. to support libraries</li> <li>- Economic development, including job clubs</li> <li>- Climate change initiatives.</li> <li>- Youth projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Service/asset delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community libraries.</li> <li>- Grounds maintenance.</li> <li>- Sports facilities.</li> <li>- Minor highways functions (e.g. footpaths, signs and verges, cleansing).</li> <li>- Car Park provision and management.</li> <li>- Leisure and arts centres.</li> </ul>
<b>Service/asset accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allotments.</li> <li>- Bus shelters.</li> <li>- Community centres.</li> <li>- Markets.</li> <li>- Museums, tourist information centres.</li> <li>- Cemeteries and church yards.</li> <li>- Parks/open space, play areas, litter bins/litter picking.</li> <li>- Public conveniences.</li> </ul>

### *Capability as a key factor*

Beyond material and utilitarian approaches of QoL that can be measured through quantitative data, the concepts of *capabilities* and *functioning* also provide a deeper understanding of how governments influence QoL. *Capabilities* refer to the range of opportunities and possibilities individuals can choose based on how they want to live, while *functioning* refers to the actual realization of these opportunities. This approach builds a bridge between QoL and urban life through the social and physical infrastructures that have been provided by the local governments, which go beyond the objective level of urban quality of life and rather try to enhance the way individuals *live* in the city. And, creating the environment for the citizens to *function* with these *capabilities* is the responsibility of the governmental entities. These concepts can be exemplified through a common practice: having a bicycle. While the capability related to a bicycle is “to cycle”, the functioning part is “mobility” which can be provided by the governmental authorities through building necessary infrastructure to give the freedom to choose different mobility options (Biagi, Ladu and Meleddu, 2018). In essence, effective governance leads to better social, economic, and environmental welfare, which translates to improved quality of life for citizens which can be achieved through using social policies. When governmental institutions, especially municipalities, have a well-designed structure that provides public services, the citizens are more likely to be happier (Càrcaba et al., 2022; Bigerna and Polinori, 2014).

In the bottom line, QoL is shaped by both objective conditions and subjective experiences, and local governments have key roles in shaping both dimensions to contribute to QoL through services they provide and the environments they create. By addressing not only the *needs* but also the *wants*, and enhancing *capabilities*, while strengthening participatory governance, local

authorities can significantly influence citizens' well-being, and in order to realise it, good governance systems should be built on the local level.

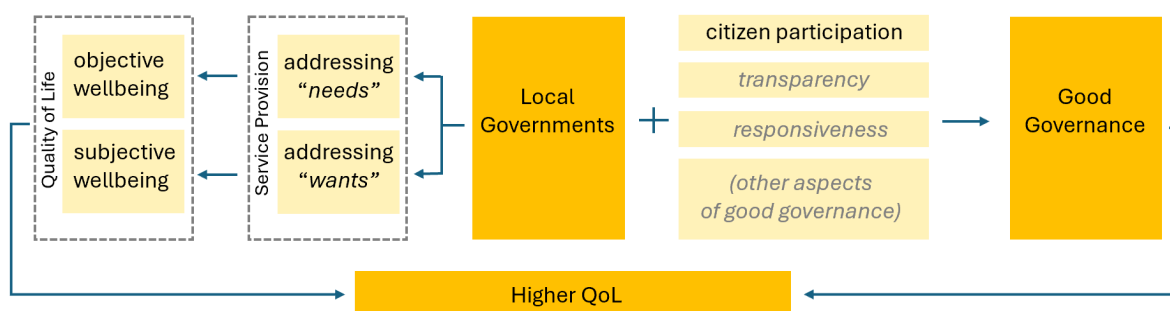


Figure 2: Connection between the local governments and good governance. (Source: Own elaboration).

### 3.2 “Good governance” of quality of life

“Good governance” is identified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) **with nine different principles: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision** (UNDP, 1997). These principles help governments build safe environments and deliver effective public services, both of which are essential for high-quality governance and the improvement of QoL (Lee, 2021). To achieve this, policy making, planning tools, and programs are the main instruments used by governmental bodies (Sollis et al., 2022). Increasingly, policymakers recognise the importance of well-being in the decision and policy-making processes. In 2020, the EU Council of Ministers agreed “*to put people and their wellbeing at the centre of policy design*” (Layard, 2021), reinforcing the idea that policies should ultimately aim to improve life quality. Apparently, this has been reflected by the EU Cohesion Policy in its Policy Objective n5 – EU closer to citizens through which deliver place-based initiatives. In this respect, it is accepted that the main objective of social policies should be improving the quality of life, and municipalities are responsible for creating the conditions to do so (Siedlecka, 2015).

The other important EU policy concerning mountain areas is the Common Agricultural Policy, and more specifically the 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar concerned with rural development. Following the Cork 2.0 Declaration launched in 2016 by the European Commission, the EU Action for Smart Villages (European Commission, 2019) was launched to strengthen the rural socio-economic fabric. “*It is conceived for rural communities, which are best placed to assess the challenges of their territories, such as depopulation, lack of basic services and economic opportunities, energy crisis, lack of connectivity and to test innovative and smart solutions*”. [Several CAP Strategic Plans](#) have planned smart village strategies and projects through LEADER local development strategies, the dedicated cooperation intervention for smart villages or investments, including infrastructure and basic services.

At that point, the share and using of public expenditures become a key issue. By investing in core public services, such as healthcare, social care, child protection, law enforcement, environmental management, and income redistribution, local governments can improve both objective

conditions and subjective well-being (Layard, 2021). Therefore, how local governments allocate and use their budgets has a direct impact on residents' quality of life (Doumpos et al., 2020; Siedlecka, 2015). For example, a study in France involving 1400 municipalities found that municipal revenues, including government grants and taxes, were strongly related to the QoL performance of the French municipalities (Doumpos et al., 2020).

Moreover, the size of the government also influences QoL, particularly in the broader economic and social context. When the local government has enough support from the private market and enough resources to implement social policies for public benefit, there is a high correlation between governance and QoL. However, when there is economic instability, while large governments face challenges, smaller authorities are more likely to have more positive impacts on QoL, considering their ability to manage resources better (Lee, 2021). Local governments' sizes, that are directly related to their budgets are highly influential on QoL, and economic and social factors are also other indicators that impact life satisfaction of local people. Therefore, while planning improvements and allocating funds, the relationship between governance size and contextual factors should be taken into account (Doumpos et al., 2020). In addition to this, also marginality or distance to the major centres of one area should be taken into account, like mountain or border regions can be depleted or less successful providing services due to the overall centralisation of functions (Oppido, Ragozino & Esposito De Vita, 2023). The relevance of this topic can be proven by two ESPON projects, namely: PROFECY - Inner peripheries: National territories facing challenges of access to basic services of general interest and DESIRE - Analysis on provision of public services in lagging regions and areas with special needs.

Furthermore, a study conducted in Hanna, Poland, a small border city, shows that EU-funded projects also have positive impacts on the local communities' life satisfaction. Beyond the physical infrastructure projects that are also provided by the national and local governments, the projects that enhance the environmental quality with supporting social infrastructure in the city through providing leisure and physical activities also improve the well-being of the local community (Siedlecka, 2015). In conclusion, both the scale and quality of public spending, along with governance efficiency and contextual stability, are central to fostering better life satisfaction at the local level. Effective resource allocation, particularly in socially and environmentally targeted areas, can significantly enhance the overall well-being of communities.

### 3.3 Participative approaches to governance of quality of life

Citizen participation becomes especially important when it comes to decisions about how public resources are allocated and decisions are made. There is a growing body of research to understand how citizen engagement in the decision-making processes influences QoL when citizens have the chance to participate in decision making processes, and the results show that participation at the local levels and QoL are strongly correlated (Atkinson and Joyce, 2010; Càrcaba et al., 2022; Càrcaba et al., 2017). Without the participation of civil actors, the governmental processes cannot go further than development strategies for governance (Atkinson and Joyce, 2010). Given the multiple interpretations of QoL, tailoring a definition that reflects the local realities through dynamic, participatory policy making is essential to address the unique



needs and priorities of the local communities and increase well-being (Atkinson and Joyce, 2010; Càrcaba et al., 2022; Self, 2015). Otherwise, there can be a negative An example of this can be the conflict of water management in the Vanoi valley in Italy (Urinary, 2025).

Engaging citizens leads to more accurate and fair resource allocation to meet community needs, thus enhancing overall well-being (McGregor et al., 2009; Sollis, Yap, Campbell, and Biddle, 2022; Càrcaba et al., 2017). For instance, municipalities that adopted participatory budgeting were able to align more closely with the real needs of residents, thereby improving QoL (Càrcaba et al., 2022). A case study from Switzerland showed that participatory decision-making processes have significant impacts on the QoL of small communities, especially when the local communities' needs vary by neighbourhood. By allowing citizens to directly influence local investment decisions, the municipality reached a higher QoL with making a better alignment between public spending and neighbourhood-specific needs. Particularly, when there is an enhancement with recreational facilities, social infrastructure and public places, it is more likely to increase life satisfaction while also improving the perceived legitimacy of local governance. Therefore, that can be said, to address place-based needs effectively, both expert insight and citizen input should be considered in governance processes (Wellings et al., 2023). Participatory processes and QoL are deeply interconnected, and as governments become more inclusive, individuals are more likely to have higher well-being.

While providing urban services, going further than simply covering basic needs to address objective well-being, and instead, aiming to fulfil individual and collective "*wants*" can enhance quality of life, especially when these aspirations are explored through participatory approaches. By recognizing and fostering citizens' real *capabilities*, rather than merely ensuring formal access to amenities, local governance can empower individuals to fully engage with the *opportunities* available to them. This capability-oriented approach requires inclusive policymaking that acknowledges communities' diverse social and economic realities. When urban policies are co-developed with citizens and grounded in local contexts, they become more effective and foster a deeper sense of well-being. In turn, such processes contribute significantly to a more equitable and sustained improvement in overall QoL.



Figure 3: Governance impacts on QoL (authors' own elaboration)

In sum, governance, particularly at the local level, plays a vital role in shaping the quality of life (QoL) of citizens through inclusive, transparent, and accountable processes. While national governance often directs macroeconomic strategies, it is local governments that are most closely intertwined with citizens' daily lives, especially in areas such as health, the environment, and social services. However, without social and economic stability, even the most well-intentioned policies are unlikely to yield significant improvements in QoL (Lee, 2021). The political and socioeconomic context in which a city operates greatly influences governance practices and their outcomes (Bigerna and Polinori, 2014). Therefore, the focus of policymakers should move beyond merely increasing the accessibility or frequency of services and instead aim to enhance citizens'



real capabilities - the freedom and opportunity to benefit from these amenities and lead fulfilling lives (Biagi, Ladu, and Meleddu, 2018).

Moreover, the integration of citizen participation in governance has been shown to correlate strongly with improved well-being, as participatory processes allow for more tailored, equitable, and responsive policy-making. When local authorities commit to inclusive governance, efficient resource allocation, and the creation of enabling environments, they directly and indirectly enhance QoL. Ultimately, fostering stable, participatory, and context-sensitive local governance is not only essential for sustainable development but also foundational to improving life satisfaction and ensuring that communities thrive.

## 4 Governance of the quality of life in the Alps

Considering the vast geographical area of the Alpine region, a multi-layered, multi-sectoral, democratic, and cooperative governance system plays a key role in QoL. Governance should have several layers that are connected to each other with consist of various sectors, while engaging people in the decision-making processes to increase life standards and well-being of the region (Sessa et al., 2024). Particularly in the protected areas, like the Alpine region, the institutional structure for legal frameworks and decision-making processes is crucial, and they should be structured in a way that connects international, national, sub-national, and local levels while strengthening transboundary cooperation between countries (Price, 2015). In this section, the governance system for the Alpine region, which spans from macro-regional to national, will be explored with a specific focus on the policy and program frameworks.

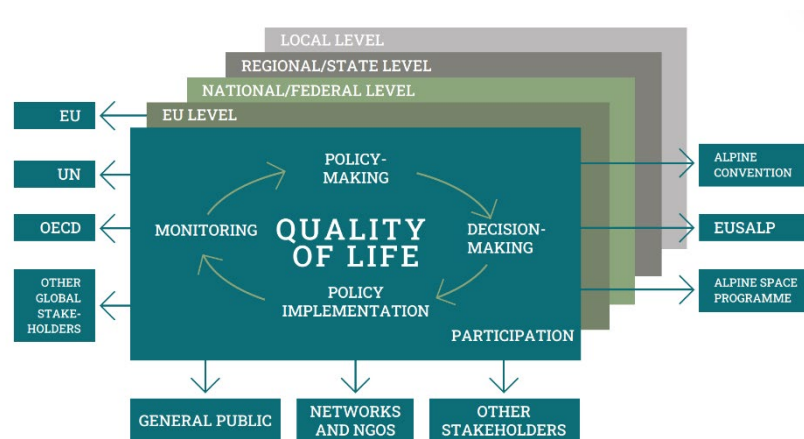


Figure 4: Governance framework for QoL in the Alps. (Source: Alpine Convention, 2025, p. 76)

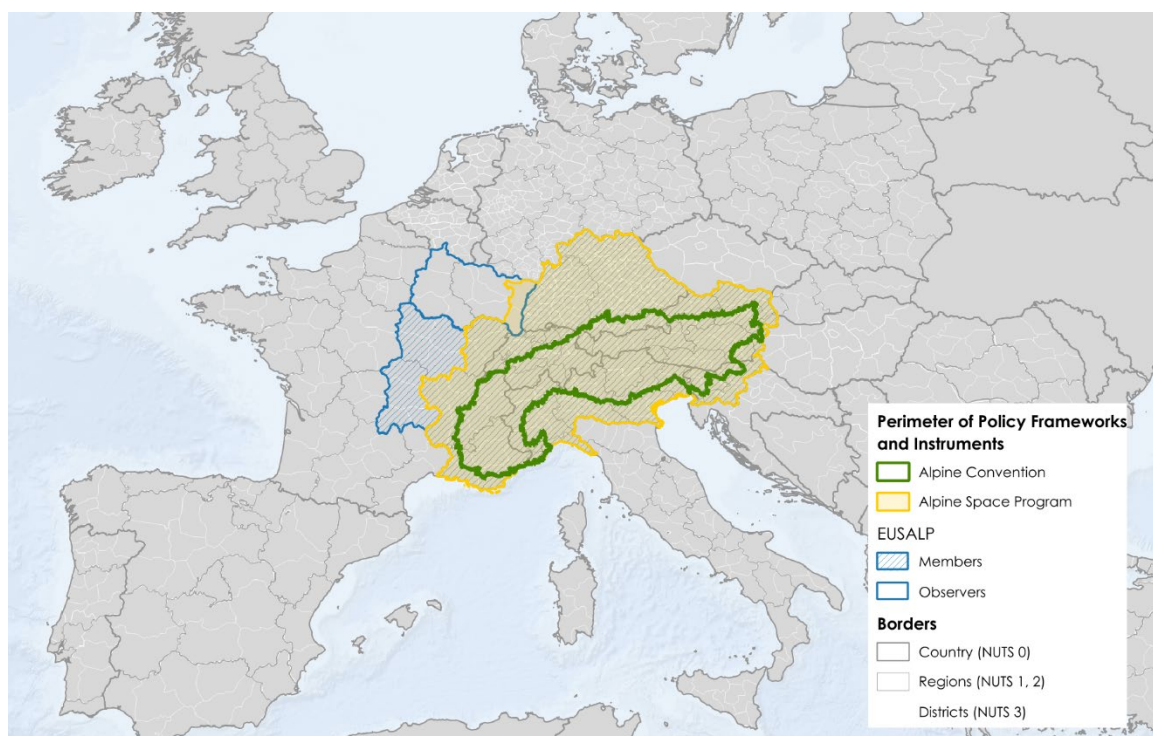
### 4.1 Existing governance setting in the Alps

The Alpine Region is governed through a multi-layered system of conventions, networks, and EU-supported strategies that aim to balance environmental, economic, and social goals.

### *Conventions, Macro-Regional Strategies and Cross-border Governance in the Alpine Region*

Given the unique geographical and socio-economic territory requiring collaborative governance to balance environmental conservation, economic development, and social well-being, several governance solutions like conventions and transnational documents are in force in the Alpine Region. The first such initiative for transnational co-operation, and a joint approach to tackle Alpine problems, was the Alpine Convention which was initiated in 1991, and then came into force in 1995. Later on, the Alpine Space programme was established by the EU, and the latest the macroregional strategy EUSALP, joining the largest territory under one organisational arrangement so far. While the Alpine Convention is an intergovernmental agreement, the EUSALP operates based on the thematic action groups and circulating presidency among the Alpine countries. The Alpine Space Programme is a joint funding instrument that has been implemented by regions and central governments (Balsiger, 2016; ESPON, 2024a).

The Alpine Convention is a legally binding international agreement among Alpine states that promotes sustainable development with the aim of balancing ecological, economic, and social interests. The core objectives of the convention are the protection of biodiversity and supporting sustainable economic activities through protocols on tourism, transport, energy, and biodiversity (ESPON, 2024a). In regard to the QoL, the Convention lays the foundation for sustainable development, and consists of overarching goals and strategies that contribute to the improvement of QoL. Moreover, the 10th Report of Assessment particularly focuses on the ways to contribute to QoL in the Alpine Region (Alpine Convention, 2025). Aiming to strengthen transboundary governance, the Convention cooperates with other programs and institutions, such as EUSALP, the Interreg Alpine Space Program, and other Alpine networks (Alpine Convention, 2025).



*Figure 5 Governance structures/frameworks in Alpine area*

The Alpine Space Program was the first transnational cooperation under the INTERREG programme that was launched in 2006, covering almost twice as much space of the Alpine Convention, including surrounding areas (Balsiger, 2016). And, adopted in 2015, to address the common challenges all the Alpine countries face, the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) is a macro-regional strategy aiming to build a prosperous, competitive, and sustainable region with focusing on economic growth through innovation, enhanced mobility and connectivity, and environmental sustainability (ESPON, 2024a, b).

In this whole process, networks in the Alpine Regions play important roles in the transboundary governance. Starting with the International Commission for the Protection of Alps (CIPRA) in the 1950s, NGOs and other local networking initiatives (such as Arge Alp, Alpen-Adria, and so on) laid the groundwork for transnational governance. The origins of the Alpine Convention were an outcome of cooperative work between CIPRA and local organizations with the support of the European Parliament's Environment Committee. After the success of the Convention with being a poignant example of ecoregional governance, the setting enabled for more networks in the following years on different sectors that ranges from governmental institutions to entrepreneurs to be established, and networks of local political actors, including municipalities, cities, ski resorts, firms, and other actors, as well. These networks are active in eight countries with about 6200 municipalities (Del Biaggio, 2014). Over time, such initiatives helped building a long-lasting interregional governance system based on the work done by international associations and communication within the states (Del Biaggio, 2014; Balsiger, 2016). Therefore, that can be said, the origin of Alpine Convention was originally an initiative from non-governmental organizations, and their importance in the transboundary governance is crucial.

International	Regional		Local
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ IUCN</li> <li>○ WWF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CIPRA</li> </ul> <p><i>Municipal Networks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Alliance in the Alps (AidA)</li> <li>○ Alpine Town of the Year Association</li> </ul> <p><i>Environmental Network</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Club Arc Alpin</li> <li>• Alparc</li> </ul>	<p><i>Sector-based Networks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alpine Pearls (tourism)</li> <li>• ISCAR (Academia)</li> </ul> <p><i>Youth Engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention</li> <li>• CIPRA Youth Council</li> <li>• EUSALP Youth Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Municipalities</li> <li>○ LAGs</li> <li>○ Local entrepreneurs</li> <li>○ Citizens</li> </ul>

Figure 6: Actors taking role in the transnational governance. (Source: own elaboration)

In sum, the governance of the Alpine region is characterised by a dynamic interplay of legally binding conventions, a macro-regional strategy, and cooperative networks, all designed to promote sustainable development and territorial cohesion. Moreover, the region's transnational, multilevel and inclusive governmental model is a compelling example of collaborative regional management. Since the establishment of CIPRA and the Alpine Convention, various institutional bodies have worked in collaboration, and allied with complementary initiatives such as EUSALP, Alpine Space Programme and other projects, further strengthen region's resilience by encouraging innovation, connectivity, and environmental stewardship.

Taking all together, these frameworks allied with inclusive and participatory approach that have been embraced in the transboundary governance not only address current challenges but also lay the groundwork for a more sustainable and prosperous Alpine future.

## 4.2 National Contexts

### ***National and Regional Level***

Most of the Alpine countries consider QoL as a cross-cutting scheme, and each country has its own unique way to approach and implement it, with the influence of international, transboundary, and national policies. International influence stems from several policy frameworks. Firstly, from the supranational level, all the Alpine countries influence the UN's sustainable development goals. Secondly, from the EU level, the Lisbon Treaty and Territorial Agenda 2030 are the frameworks influencing countries' policies regarding QoL (Marot et al., 2023).

In the national and regional contexts, countries reflected the concept of QoL with a wide range of institutional approaches. Federal states such as Austria, Germany, and Switzerland rely heavily on decentralized mechanisms, granting significant autonomy to regional and local levels through sectoral policies, spatial planning tools, and participatory governance initiatives. In contrast, unitary states like Slovenia, France, and Italy address QoL primarily through national development strategies. Additionally, supplementary programs such as Recovery and Resilience Programs (Italy and France) and other EU Programs, actions, and investment plans are used for the same aim. In sectoral terms, in Austria and Germany, the topic is already a part of spatial planning and regional development discourses. In Italy, it is addressed through policy frameworks, and in France, the topic is still in progress to be integrated into the policy frameworks. Moreover, smaller states like Monaco and Liechtenstein focus on sectoral policies and community-level initiatives to promote living standards. Furthermore, several countries established new governmental bodies to facilitate the implementation and monitoring processes of QoL. France's Commission for Sustainable Development, Italy's Steering Committee for Well-being, and Monaco's Environments and Quality of Life Commission are institutional authorities responsible for the integration of QoL (Alpine Convention, 2025; Marot et al., 2023). In the bottom line, each nation has its own way to integrate QoL into its agenda. However, only Switzerland and Slovenia have policies which directly focus on quality of life as a main policy concept; Italy, and Monaco have institutional bodies for improving the QoL.

Also initiated by the EU, are the regional development programmes which most of the Alpine countries use as ground strategies to absorb EU funds, available from the European Regional Development Fund. These programmes are comprehensive and usually include objectives and measures that address the economy, the environment, and society. Among other strategic documents, there can be sectoral documents, prepared on the local level, e.g. general development strategies, tourism strategies, energy concepts, strategies related to sport and recreation, sustainable mobility concepts, and others. The strategies concerning QoL can also target one nature protection area, e.g. a national park area, a biosphere area. Such strategies are prepared with the purpose of balancing, on one side, the nature protection and conservation.

### ***Local Level***

No comprehensive overview has been done yet to analyse the existing policies and institutional arrangements to support a good quality of life on the local level in the Alps. An attempt at this was done within the RSA 10 Background study (Marot et al. 2023), where various types of policy documents were reported for the regional and local level as to be of relevance to QoL governance, though not necessarily directly targeting QoL as an umbrella overall policy. On the regional or

intermunicipal level, the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) plans were recognised as very relevant since they enable the local communities to prepare in a bottom-up manner various initiatives and projects to contribute to a good quality of life. Originating from the LEADER initiative, CLLD has been used as a model to bring various local actors including businesses, community groups, and local actors, to build bottom-up Local Development Strategies (LDS) to address local challenges. In order to operationalize the strategies, Local Action Groups (LAGs) has been introduced as public-private partnerships that is involving local governments, businesses and civil society to select projects, manage their budgets and apply for additional funds (ESPON, 2024a). Among the projects that have been conducted in the Alpine region, Dolomiti Live (Austria and Italy) and HEurOpen are poignant examples as transboundary projects. The Dolomiti Live LAG operates in the Dolomiti Mountain region across Italy and Austria, with a focus on economic development, preserving cultural heritage, and protecting the environment within the UNESCO Heritage Site. Similarly, HEurOpen, operating between Italy and Austria, aims to bridge the cultural and economic differences through working on rural tourism, heritage conservation, environmental protection, and local entrepreneurship while promoting local identity and sustainable development (ESPON, 2024a; 2024b). Given the fact that CLLD is initiated by the common EU agricultural policy, they are relevant for all the EU member states in the Alpine area. Their relevance was further emphasised since they focus on the rural areas where living conditions are generally recognised as to be worse than in the urban areas.

Among strategies present in the Alpine regions and local communities (see Table 3), the Alpine countries reported various types of documents, including development strategies (DE-Bayern, SI, IT), concepts (LI), schemes (FR), and visions (CH).

*Table 3: Overview of the documents, relevant to QoL governance, on the regional and local level.  
(Source: Marot et al., 2024)*

Country	Example of documents to contribute to good QoL
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Development programmes and concepts (not necessarily NUTS3 level, can be also other areas of similar size, e.g. the area of one national park)</li> <li>_ Spatial planning documents (mostly on the local level)</li> <li>_ Sectoral documents and guidelines, e.g. for nature conservation, education, health, and transport (joint responsibility of national, state and regional level)</li> </ul>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Regional Development, Sustainable Development and equality of territories scheme (SRADDET)</li> <li>_ Local (urban scale or multi-municipalities scale) territorial coherence schemes (SCOT)</li> <li>_ Territorial Climate – Air – Energy Plan (PCAET)</li> <li>_ Interregional governance programmes – strategic provisions to improve QoL, they especially refer to the quality of spaces and landscapes</li> </ul>
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Regional strategies (implemented by municipalities, districts, and regions)</li> <li>_ Regional Spatial Plans</li> </ul> <p><i>No info on the local level</i></p>
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Regional development programme – a general framework and a strategy for regional development</li> <li>_ Regional and Provincial Sustainable Development Strategies</li> <li>_ Metropolitan Agendas for sustainable development – integration of existing instruments to maintain and increase QoL</li> </ul>



Liechtenstein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Various concepts and policies steering QoL, e.g. sustainability strategy (municipalities)</li> <li>_ Promotion and development of the infrastructure to increase QoL (village level)</li> </ul>
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Regional development programmes – a long-term vision for the social, economic and environmental development of the region</li> <li>_ Measures and instruments to provide development support for disadvantaged areas, as are areas with unemployment rates and border areas</li> <li>_ Local development strategies and other sectoral strategic documents (local development strategies, tourism strategies, culture strategies, transport, energy strategies etc.)</li> </ul>
Switzerland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Cantonal level, example of Bern's Strategy 2030 as an umbrella strategy for quality of life</li> <li>_ Municipalities implement laws and strategies of the respective cantons, creation regions to address cross-communal issues</li> </ul>

Although there is no unified approach to policy making and existing policies on the topic of quality of life in the Alpine communities, what is common to them is the local bottom-up initiatives. These are projects or local actions that in most cases have been initiated by the citizens, local NGO's or interest groups, or also, by the official local administration. Examples of such local projects and initiatives would be:

- “Zum Glueck jetzt” (in translation, For the happiness, now) – an initiative of the Austrian municipality Moosburg which focuses on community building, creation of public space and infrastructure, and a well-being for the local population;
- “Residenzialità in Montagna” is an Italian initiative to support people moving back to the Alps to settle and work remotely;
- A French association called Village of Joy which is involved in organising local events aimed at providing villages livelier, and providing certain public services simultaneously;
- Also in France, Mountain Wilderness organized a national consultation “*Grande concertation Montagnes pour protéger et faire vivre les montagnes en 2030*” to collect citizen ideas about how to protect and live in mountain areas after 2030. The consultation was used as an opportunity to organise local events to bring participants on a prospective journey to the Alps in 2030.
- Several “collectives” (not formally organised as NGOs) based in the French Alps work on the very local level to help put the spotlight on non-dominant narratives and to imagine a different future collectively: this is the case in the Vercors massif, the Ecrins massif, around the Maurienne valley, etc. Austrian cooperative Gafrenz supports regional supply with bringing together the local suppliers of general goods;
- Traditional fairs in the rural areas that empower the local and regional identities, but at the same time also provide a tourist attraction, e.g. examples of celebrations related to livestock returning from mountain pastures to the valley at the end of the summer;
- Prostofer service – a Slovenian initiative that together with local communities provides transportation for elderly people, especially in remote areas, helping to improve their mobility;

- “Torino Urban Lab” is an association formed through collaboration between public and private actors. It supports local development by improving communication among decision-makers, experts, and citizens by collecting and sharing knowledge about the city, architecture, and urban transformation projects;
- “Voci di Quartiere” is an Italian initiative aimed at improving quality of life in local districts. It strengthens communication with residents and focuses on responding to their needs, particularly in relation to public spaces.

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist across the Alpine region. A recurring issue is the disconnection between transboundary, national and local policies, where top-down strategies sometimes fail to meet the nuanced needs of diverse territories (Alpine Convention, 2025; Marot et al., 2023). Additionally, cross-border collaboration remains weak, with municipalities often prioritizing national frameworks over broader regional cooperation, thereby missing opportunities for cohesive development in transnational Alpine spaces (Alpine Convention, 2025; ESPON, 2024a). Nonetheless, many regional projects—particularly those related to spatial planning, sustainable mobility, and climate resilience—contribute indirectly but significantly to improving QoL. Moving forward, strengthening multilevel governance, enhancing coordination between national and local actions, and fostering cross-border partnerships will be critical to ensuring sustainable, inclusive, and resilient Quality of Life improvements throughout the Alpine region.

#### 4.3 Monitoring of the quality of life in the Alpine countries

In the same way that there is no unanimous definition of the concept, there is also no one single approach as to how to measure it. Some approaches emphasize quantitative measurement of life conditions (e.g. ESPON’s Territorial Quality of Life), while others rely more on people’s perceptions of their quality of life by expressing their satisfaction with living conditions or well-being via the surveys, like the European Social Survey, EU-SILC, and others. Different national platforms and monitoring approaches exist across the Alpine countries. Examples are the Austrian national attempt “Wie geht es Oesterreich” (Statistik Austria, 2021), German platform “Living well in Germany” (The Federal Government, 2025), EUROSTAT’s platform quality of life, and multiple studies done on measuring quality of life based on ESPON’s territorial quality of life concept (ESPON, 2020), resting on the three pillars: the good life enablers, life maintenance and life flourishing. The monitoring activities can also result in production of the maps or spatial depiction of quality of life, as it is with the ESPON quality of life Atlas for Slovenia (ESPON, 2021) or ÖROK ATLAS in Austria which has been, since 2004, a regional monitoring system with indicators that indirectly address.

To measure quality of life, two types of indicators can be used: objective circumstances of people’s lives, such as income and education attainment; and subjective evaluations of life circumstances, such as satisfaction with various aspects of life (Heal & Sigelman, 1996; Schalock, 1996). In addition, objective dimensions of quality of life can also be considered and cover employment opportunities, job security, recreational opportunities, family structure, social networks, historical infrastructure and environmental factors including crowding, noise, litter, traffic congestion, driving hazards, and water and air pollution (Anderecek & Nyaupane, 2011). An Alpine example of such approach is the study of Keller (2010) which used a set of 50 indicators and three dimensions:

environment, economic and socio-culture dimension. Measures can also be absolute or relative, indexing people's QoL or comparing them to some standard such as what they would ideally want (Heal & Sigelman, 1996). The studies can also focus on the territorial dimension of quality of life, and investigated the differences between the territories and the living conditions based on that. For example, the urban and rural areas can be compared in regards to what quality of life they offer (Marot et al., 2025; ESPON, 2018). To this effect, DG AGRI of the European Commission has been working on the concept of the "rural lenses" on the basis of the Spanish experiment since 2016. Similarly, in the French Alpine regions (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Sud) the new "Réflexe Jeunes" aims at ensuring the habit of systematically involving youth in policy-making to ensure the impacts of the policy on this social group are taken into account. The city of Grenoble went even further with a "gender barometer" against which all impacts of local policy-making are measured.

However, the monitoring of the quality of life can also be based on the subjective perception of the people or as was the case of the Erasmus+ Alpine Compass Project a specific target groups, in this case the youth (CIPRA). The evaluation was based on the interviews and focus groups with the youth, and resulted in the postulates the youth formulated as the major outcomes. There are also specific regional studies in the Alpine area, such as the report on quality of life for the South Tyrol (Bauch and Tauber, 2023), survey within the Interreg CBC AT-DE project Life-value Alpine regions, the Bavarian State Government report "Heimatspiegel 2022" which asked about the factors influencing quality of life and their satisfaction with it. Furthermore, the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung), issued the study at local levels, thereby addressing the Quality of Life in small cities and rural communities (Lebensqualität in kleinen Städten und Landgemeinden, 05/2011), as well as in small towns in Germany (02/2022). The Liechtenstein Institute conducted two studies on satisfaction and QoL: LIE-BAROMETER (2019 and 2020). Since 2016, the French Observatory of Well-being (Observatoire du bien-être - CEPREMAP) has measured the well-being of French people in two observatory dashboards: 1. A quarterly dashboard on well-being, based on the 20 questions asked as supplementary questions to the INSEE (French Statistical Office) monthly household survey (CAMME) of a representative sample of approximately 1800 people.

On the local level, the French and Italian communities are the most proactive one concerning the monitoring of quality of life. The Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research ISPRA (Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale) provides a report on Urban Environmental Quality (Qualità dell'Ambiente Urbano). Furthermore, the Steering Committee Cabina di regia Benessere Italia is monitoring some institutional instruments related to QoL, oversees welfare policies, and evaluates citizens' QoL. The Metropole de Grenoble-Alpes developed the sustainable territorial well-being indicators (IBEST – Indicateurs de Bien-être Soutenable Territoriales), which aims to measure 8 dimensions of well-being: work and employment, assertiveness and commitment, democracy and living together, natural environment, health, access to public services, time and pace of life, and assistance needs. The data is gathered by the quantitative survey data (sample 1,000) supplemented by information gathered during open forum and participatory processes with citizens, technicians, and elected officials. The evaluation, based on these indicators, is supposed to challenge policy objectives and evaluate interventions in terms of the well-being of the people.



Also, the measuring of the governance and its performance is not straight forward, and there is a general lack of covering this topic, even more so, on the local level. To monitor the governance situation, there are several indicators at either national or regional level (usually NUTS 2 level), often combined and showing several dimensions. An example of such an indicator is the European Quality of Government Index (EQI), which captures citizens' perceptions of corruption and the quality of public services such as health, education and policing (European Commission, 2021). In the area of governance, the OECD monitors several indicators and produces a biennial report describing the situation at national level. Governance indicators include trust in government, local government, the legal system and satisfaction with democracy (OECD, 2023). Governance at national level is measured by the Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGIs). The indicators show the state of play in the areas of democratic and long-term governance and sustainable policy-making (SGI, n.d.). Governance is addressed in SDG 17 - Partnership for the Goals, which contains five indicators, mainly aimed at monitoring financial management on the national level. Those indicators are 1) Official Development Assistance as a share of Gross National Income, 2) Financing from Developing Countries, 3) Imports from Developing Countries, 4) Gross Government Debt, and 5) Environmental Taxes as a share of total tax revenues (SURS, n.d.). ESPON has also been working on indicators in the area of governance. The KIPCASP project has explored indicators in the field of territorial cohesion and spatial planning that can help in the preparation of development strategies (ESPON, 2013). There is also the Europe 2020 Regional Index indicator, which shows how well regions in European countries are performing in achieving the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission, 2014).

To conclude, there multiple challenges of measuring quality of life on the local level and its governance. Those are:

- The data is seldom available on the LAU level;
- There is lack of indicators to measure governance performance, especially on the local level;
- The data is not comparable across the Alpine territories and countries, due to approach to defining the territorial units;
- The QoL studies on the regional and local level are often one-time studies that capture only the situation at one point in time, and also limit the comparison possibilities across different territories.

## 5 The role of local communities in securing good QoL in the Alpine area

At the local level, **municipalities** play an important role, particularly regarding policymaking. Their biggest task is to put the quality of life on the political agenda as an overall, umbrella topic of the existing and forthcoming development strategies, and spatial plans. This means that the QoL is mentioned in the major strategic documents, and not only addressed partially by the sectoral strategies. Municipalities should also initiate the monitoring of QoL and occasionally measure how satisfied are the locals with the living conditions and their quality of life. Furthermore, municipalities are usually the ones to provide funds for delivery of services of general interest, and they are doing this under different management models (public services, concessions, etc.). In addition, it is of importance that local administration enables public participation, both in the

policy making and delivery. This can be beneficial for supporting long-term goals, and sharing the common vision among all local stakeholders.

Other key stakeholders include **local associations, youth, civil society, local entrepreneurs** and **specific social groups** such as farmers, tourists, and local clubs. These stakeholders are important both, for the policy initiation, and later as well, for the policy implementation. It depends on the local community how strong the voices of the non-governmental organisations are, and what their impact on policy making can really be.

**Utility providers** and **public service providers** also have a significant role since they are in charge of the services of general interests' provision. Those are the services considered as public goods to be secured by the local communities under the non-market conditions. However, some of the services, needed on the daily bases, can also be available to the locals, under market conditions, e.g. basic shops where you can buy groceries. There are differences among Alpine countries in regulation of services provision, e.g. in defining the minimum distance or minimum level services that needs to be available to each inhabitant of the Alps based on the area in which they live (Kolaric et al., 2018).

**Local action groups** represent another stakeholder, bringing together a mix of local actors to discuss and determine bottom-up approaches and projects to contribute to better quality of life. They were established to absorb the EU fund, available via the LEADER programme.

To summarize, the role of the local communities in securing good QoL is as follows:

1. Implementation of the supranational, national and regional policies concerning QoL, including the sectoral policies;
2. Preparation of the local strategic policies and implementation measures to secure good quality of life;
3. Provision of the services for the locals to secure access to daily good and basic services of general interest (public transport, health service, primary education and children care etc.);
4. Frequent monitoring of the quality of life and the locals' satisfaction with it;
5. Integration of civil society into policy making and implementation concerning QoL;
6. Consideration of vulnerable groups while preparing measure to support good QoL, e.g. youth, elderly, and others.

## 6 Challenges of governing QoL on the local level

As previous studies have shown, governing QoL in the Alpine area is not a trivial task (ESPON, RSA 10, etc.). Namely, there are multiple challenges and factors which all can impede how well local communities perform in securing a good quality of life. Among those factors are:

- The Alpine relief or geomorphology which influences the settlement patterns, accessibility and travel time to services, and the costs of maintaining and building the new infrastructure;
- Extreme weather events and climate change as environmental factors causing infrastructural damage or even threatening health or life of the Alpine citizens;
- Migration trend which influences work market, job opportunities, and as well the holiday homes market;
- Tourism as major economic activity in some of the areas that on one side contributes positively to the economy and provides the jobs, however, in the times of climate change also poses a future challenge;
- Digitalisation and technological changes which bring new solutions and options for societal life and work possibilities;
- Changes in the life style towards individualisation which represents an obstacle to maintaining the social life in Alpine settlements, and others.

These factors should be certainly taking into account while preparing and implementing the policies in the field of quality of life. As a reflection of the analysis done in the process of the position paper's presentation and discussing the matter with the stakeholders, the following challenges related specifically to the governance, should be addressed:

- Except for the Multiannual programme of Alpine Convention, and the respecting 10<sup>th</sup> Report on the State of the Alps, specifically relating to the QoL, there is no common QoL focused supranational Alpine policy;
- No common governance framework exists neither on the national or the lower governance levels; usually the topic is addressed either by the joint development strategies, or the partial sectoral strategies which cover only one topic of the QoL;
- No common understanding of QoL concept;
- Cross-border dimension, although important and relevant in the case of services provision, is not necessarily covered by the existing policies;
- Lack of regulation across the Alpine countries to secure good standards of the services provision;
- Lack of QoL targeted and place-based specific policies;
- Need for a better consideration of subjective perception of QoL in the policy making;
- Missing monitoring system for QoL on the local level (lack of time perspective, lack of data and knowledge);
- Different size of the local communities which mean different roles, functions, capacities (more capacities needed as this is a complex matter); and
- Low level of public participation in policy making and implementation concerning QoL.

These conclusions will serve as an important input into the following activities of the GOVQoL including work with the local communities and territories, and disseminating the project across the Alp.

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