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RELEVANCE OF QUALITY OF LIFE FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

POSITION PAPER SHORT VERSION



1

Why this POSITION PAPER

The position paper lays the ground for the future work of the GOVQoL project, the full title Empowering local governance of Alpine communities for a better quality of life. The paper was prepared to assure common understanding of the quality of life, elaborate the relationship between the quality of life and local governance, and emphasise why this relationship should be further strengthened. The position paper lays the ground for the future work of the GOVQoL project, the full title Empowering local governance of Alpine communities for a better quality of life. The paper was prepared to assure common understanding of the quality of life, elaborate the relationship between the quality of life and local governance, and emphasise why this relationship should be further strengthened.

For whom?

Local:
the local policy and decision makers, such as local civil servants and elected representatives, the local policy implementors and service providers, NGO's.



National:
the representatives of the national ministries, responsible for spatial planning or otherwise the sectors concerned with the quality of life, like health, economy, education and alike.

Supranational:
the representatives of Alpine-wide organisations and bodies, e.g. EUSALP, Alpine Convention, European funding programmes like Alpine Space Programme, NGO's like CIPRA and others.

2

The CONCEPT of quality of life



Quality of life refers to the (perceived) living conditions in a particular location, including the economic, social and ecological conditions of the population living there.

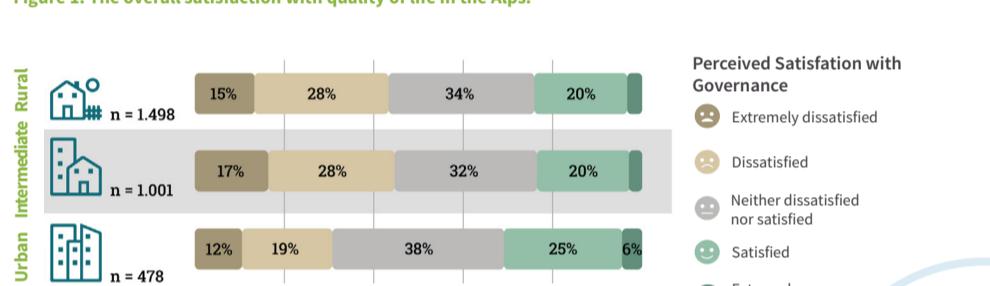
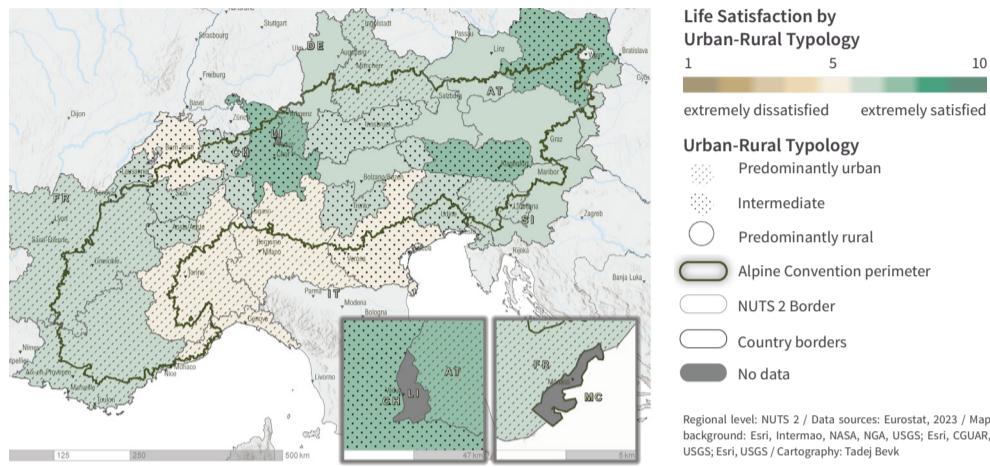
The quality of life (QoL) has been (re)gaining attention on the public policy agenda in the last 15 years or so. This is represented in multiple platforms the European countries' governments have established to increase awareness on the topic, offer definitions of the concept, and establish monitoring frameworks. There is an abundance of definitions and models of quality of life, and the conclusion of inspecting these definitions is that quality of life is a multidimensional concept covering many aspects of people's lives and living conditions. Within the GOVQoL discussion with the stakeholders, the following topics were identified as relevant to the Alpine communities:

- 1. Access to services** of general interest in general, and specifically in remote and rural areas (i.e. health service, education, police, postal services, social security, etc.)
- 2. Quality of infrastructure**, including road infrastructure and internet connectivity
- 3. Public transport** and high dependency on the car mobility
- 4. Access to housing** and opportunities for the long-term rental
- 5. Labor market**
- 6. Leisure activities**
- 7. Places for** both, informal and formal **socializing**
- 8. Public participation** in policy making and enabling democracy

However, each of the Alpine local communities might according to their local circumstances choose only some of the topics or even identify additional ones, not listed above. Also, the use of the term "quality of life" is not unified across the Alpine countries: "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.

3 Quality of life in the ALPS

As analysed in the 10th Report on the State of the Alps¹, the Alpine area on one side offers very good living conditions that people find very satisfactory, however, there remains room for improvement in certain quality of life aspects, such as housing, governance and work conditions. The main strengths of living in the Alps—the pristine environment and a well-preserved nature - might be limited in the future due to multiple challenges such as the public transport, provision of services, impacts of climate change, natural risks, and other, that all can significantly contribute to the decrease or dissatisfaction with the quality of life. Among these challenges is also governance aspect which in the Alps has been notoriously evaluated as poor². Governance is an aspect of quality of life that is highly dependent on the national context and the governance frameworks that comprise it. Although the area has a long-standing tradition of cooperation networks and joint institutions³, the local population is not satisfied with policy and decision-making (over 75% were dissatisfied or neither satisfied or dissatisfied), nor do people really take part in these processes². 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.



5 CHALLENGES of governing quality of life on the local level

As previous studies have shown, governing quality of life in the Alpine area is not a trivial task. 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 geomorphology** which influences the settlement patterns, accessibility and travel time to services, and the costs of maintaining and building the infrastructure;
- **Extreme weather events** and climate change as environmental factors causing infrastructural damage or even threatening health or life of the Alpine citizens;
- **Migration trends** which influence work market, job opportunities, and the holiday homes market as well;
- **Tourism as major economic activity** which on one side contributes positively to the economy and job market, but 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 lifestyle** towards individualisation which represents an obstacle to maintaining the social life in Alpine settlements.

Taken these challenges into account, **the role of the local communities** in securing good quality of life should be as follows:

1. **Implementation of the supranational, national and regional policies** concerning quality of life, including the sectoral policies;
2. **Preparation of the local strategic policies** and implementation measures (also as pilots) and 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 quality of life;
6. **Consideration of vulnerable groups** while preparing measures to support good quality of life, e.g. youth, elderly, and others.

4 Role of LOCAL COMMUNITIES and GOVERNANCE in securing good QoL

One of the existing studies on governance of quality of life concluded 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” certainly provides evidence that the topic should be addressed on the local level and by public administration⁴. Local governments have key roles in shaping both dimensions to contribute to quality of life through services they provide and the environments they create quality of life.

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 level⁵.

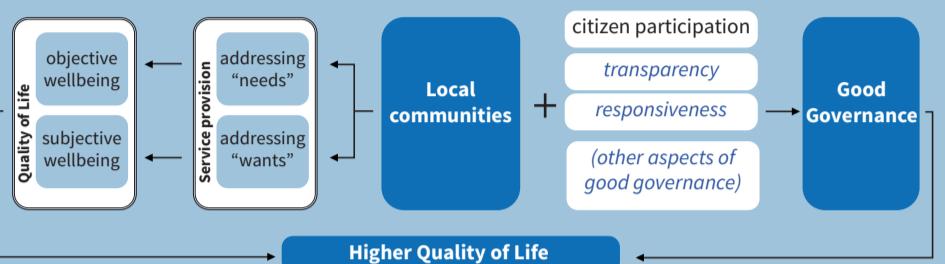
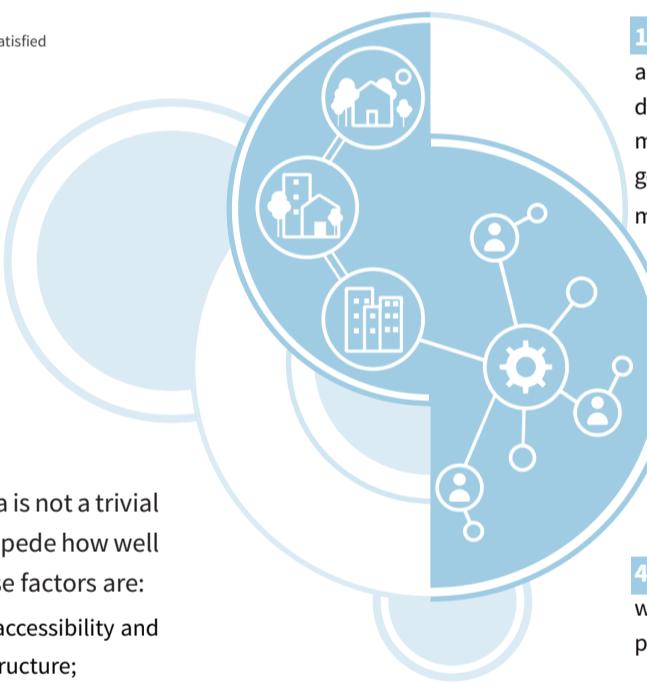


Figure 3: Showing the role of the local level in securing good quality of life.

! **Governance** refers to the ways organizations and societies make important decisions, involving stakeholders in those processes while ensuring accountability and building trust through participative processes.

Within the **local governance system** there are **multiple stakeholders** who each play **important role in governing the quality of life**. Those are:



1. **Municipalities** should put the quality of life on the political agenda as a core topic and integrate it into the major strategic documents. More to that, they are in charge of establishing the monitoring of quality of life, secure provision of services of general interest, and enable participation of public in policy making.
2. **Local associations, local entrepreneurs, civil society and youth, specific social groups** initiate the policy preparation and implementation. It depends on the how strong local communities' voice is, and what their impact on policy making can really be. They are also the sources and implementors of local bottom-up initiatives.
3. **Utility and public service providers** provide the services of general interests.
4. **Local action groups** represent a mix of local actors which discusses and determines bottom-up approaches and projects to contribute to better quality of life.

6 The GOVQoL project RESPONDS and CONTRIBUTES to the role of the LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The GOVQoL project responds to these challenges and **contributes to empowering the role of the local communities in regards to the quality of life**, by delivering the following activities:

- **On-site workshops with local communities** to evaluate the current state of quality of life governance in selected Alpine communities, identify gaps, and build tailored solutions;
- **Awareness raising seminars** to increase understanding of quality of life governance and highlight the impact for Alpine communities;
- **A handbook** gathering best practices and governance instruments;
- **Place-based roadmaps** for the development of actionable local strategies to integrate quality of life in policy-making processes on a long-term basis;
- **Alpine umbrella roadmap** presenting the guidelines for better local governance of quality of life, available in all Alpine languages.

