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SmartCommUnity

# SmartCommUnity Project

## Strengthening and expansion of the EUSALP Smart Alps Network

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University of Ljubljana (Lead partner)

Poliedra - Research and Consultancy Centre of Milan's Polytechnic University on Environmental

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## Introduction

The Smart Alps Network has been founded by EUSALP Action Group 5 (AG5) during the first Digital Alps Conference in 2021. Unfortunately the activities for the network could not be kicked off due to missing financial resources and it took till beginning of 2023 that the situation improved with the launch of the Interreg Alpine Space SmartCommUnity project. This report aims to present what has been undertaken and achieved in the first two years of the SmartCommUnity project (retrospect) in different fields of intervention and what are steps foreseen for the future to strengthen and expand the Smart Alps Network (perspective).

The SmartCommUnity project, officially titled "Creating a Functional Transnational Community Towards Smart Transition in the Alps," is a collaborative initiative designed to support Alpine rural areas in fully leveraging the benefits of digitalization. The project aims to foster smart transitions and create a functional transnational community within the Alps, aligning with the objectives of the EUSALP Action Group 5 Smart Alps Network. Supported by the Interreg Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027, the project operates over a dynamic 3-year period. Its structure is organized into three key working packages: EUSALP Uptake and Policy Integration (WPEU), Test Activities and Networking for SmartCommUnity (WPTAN), and Innovation Tools for SmartCommUnity (WPIT). The coordination of the Smart Alps Network is affiliated to the working package EUSALP Uptake and Policy Integration (WPEU) and to the project partners Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta and the Swiss Center for Mountain Regions.



# Fields of intervention

## 1.1 Organisational structures

### Retrospect

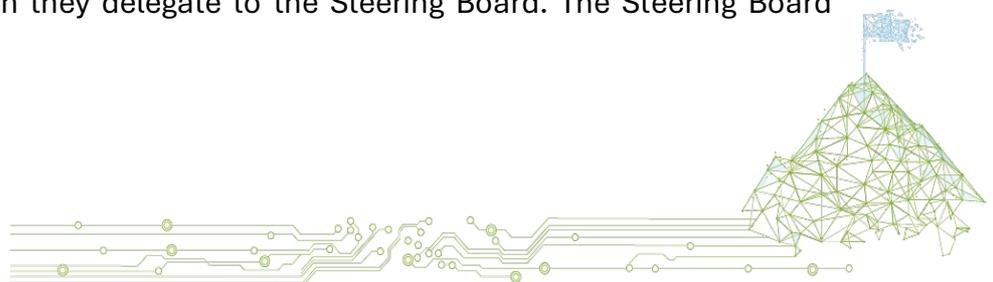
In February 2024 the Smart Alps steering board composed of Tea Piccardo (representative of municipality of Campo Liguria), Bernd Kalbermatten (representative of municipality of Saas Fee) and Janja Viher (representative of municipality of Kungota) adopted the Smart Alps regulations. They are available on <https://smart-alps.eu/Smart-Alps-network/> and state the following with relation to organisational structures:

Membership in the Network is to be open to all smart villages and smart regions, which share the aim of a smart transition of their own territory according to the definition as given in the first paragraph.

Organisations and institutions active in the domain of smart villages can join the network as “contributors”. Whereas members can decide on the working programme, contributors have no such formal rights.

For adhesion as a member or contributor, interested parties shall write an email expressing their interest to the secretariat (contact: [peter.niederer@sab.ch](mailto:peter.niederer@sab.ch)).

A Steering Board composed of at minimum three members and at maximum one representative from a smart region / smart village from each Alpine Country – which means seven members - will be formed. The regions and villages from each country will decide freely on the person they delegate to the Steering Board. The Steering Board



elects a president amongst its members. The members of the Steering Board and the president are acting for two years and can be re-elected.

The secretariat of the Network is assured within the framework of the Alpine Space Program project SmartCommUnity by the Swiss Center for Mountain Regions (SAB) (contact: [peter.niederer@sab.ch](mailto:peter.niederer@sab.ch)). The backup contact is [eusalp.ag5@regione.vda.it](mailto:eusalp.ag5@regione.vda.it)

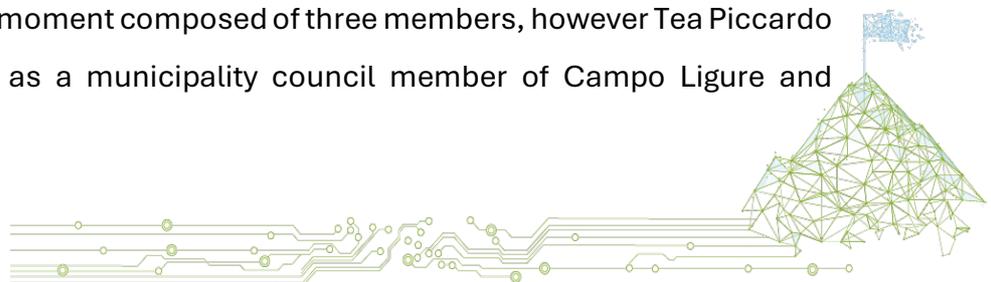
All the above mentioned regulations have been put in place and are fully operational.

## Perspective

Up to now the Smart Alps network counts 28 members (Austria 1, France 3, Germany 3, Italy 13, Slovenia 3, Switzerland 5). Member acquisition is continuing so that the network will expand. The adhesion process proved to be quite effective, interested parties sent an email with an expression of interest for adhesion to Peter Niederer. To further formalize this process an adhesion form will be created and uploaded to <https://smart-alps.eu/Smart-Alps-network/> where all the other necessary information for adhesion can be found.

The membership in the Network is open to all Smart Villages and Regions, which share the aim of a smart transition of their own territory according to the definition as given in the first paragraph of the regulation. However if a label – as wished by a majority of survey respondents - will be introduced, an appropriate set of adhesion criterion will be defined. The decision that organisations and institutions active in the domain of smart villages can join the network as “contributors” has proven its effectiveness and will be maintained. At the moment the network counts four contributors.

The Steering Board is at the moment composed of three members, however Tea Piccardo has ceased her functions as a municipality council member of Campo Ligure and



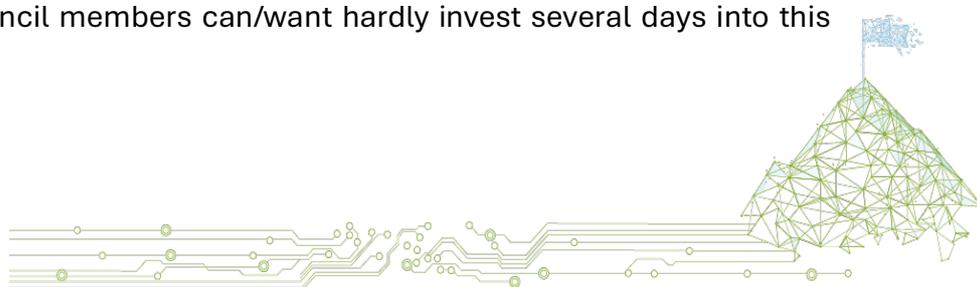
decided to leave the steering board in May 2025, this means that one chair of the steering board is vacant and a replacement has to be searched. Peter Niederer is in contact with the municipality of Campo Ligure to find a substituting member for Tea Piccardo. On the other hand the steering board can be extended to up to 7 members – from each member country one - and efforts will be undertaken to do so.

The secretariat of the Network is also assured even after the closure of the Alpine Space Program project SmartCommUnity. The Swiss Center for Mountain Regions (SAB) will continue the secretariat under the umbrella of the Horizon SmartEra project. Furthermore the SmartCommUnity consortium seeks to postulate for a follow-up project in the last call of the Interreg Alpine Space programme 2021-2027 to access additional financial means for the Smart Alps Network.

## 1.2. Meetings and exchanges of good practices, initiatives and activities

### Retrospect

All members were invited to meetings related to the Digital Alps Conference taking place 2023 in Courtmayeur (Italy) and in 2024 in Isola (Slovenia) as well as to the study trips carried out in the framework of the smartcommunity partner meetings in 2024 in Aosta (Italy) and in 2025 in Valence (France). In general it can be said that the participation of Smart Alps members was meager, the maximum of participation could be reached during the study trip to Valence, where six Smart Alps members took part. The travel and accommodation costs can not explain the low participation of members since for the study trips a budget was allocated by the Autonomous Region of Valle d’Aosta (AG5 Lead Partner and partner of the smartcommunity project) to that end. The most important hindrance must be the time needed for travelling and staying on site. It seems that mayors and municipal council members can/want hardly invest several days into this kind of exchange.



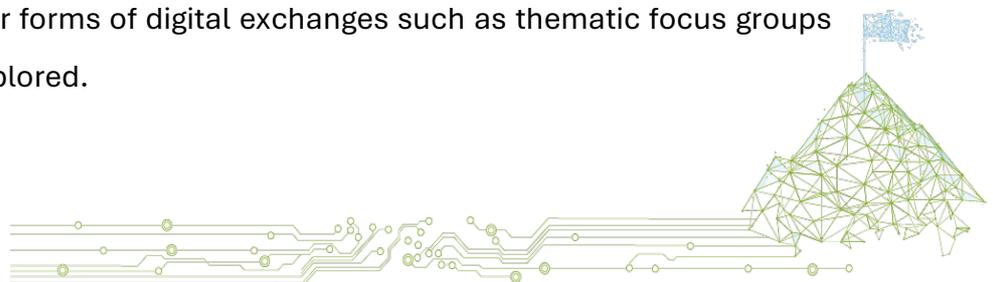
Up to now 4 webinars have been organized on: 1) how to become a smart village 2) how to build and maintain a coworking space 3) how to improve the mobility by the help of new offers and digitalization 4) how to establish and run a municipal, digital communication platform. The topics were defined according to a survey carried out among the Smart Alps members. The format of the 1.5 hours zoom webinars was always the same, the process was structured into a) two input presentations b) group discussions in break out rooms c) concluding synthesis and closure. The topics were defined according to a survey carried out among the Smart Alps members. A survey on satisfaction confirmed that the format of the webinar should be maintained.

The participation to the webinars one to three oscillated between 28 and 35 participants. With the introduction of an artificial intelligence translation tool (wordly), the number of participants could be significantly increased to 46. Thanks to the translation tool a larger group of people that is less familiar with the English language could be reached.

## Perspective

The idea to strengthen the participation in physical meetings is not realistic since in future – under the umbrella of the Horizon SmartEra project - there will be no travel and accommodation budget available for Smart Alps members. Therefore the online exchange shall be improved via eg. The smart-alps digital exchange platform (see section digital platform) and the webinars.

As mentioned above, a survey confirmed the satisfaction of the Smart Alps members with the format of the webinars. As a logic consequence the format will be maintained and the utilization of the artificial intelligence tool formalized. Also in future, the topics treated in the webinar will be collected and defined through a participatory process among the members. Other forms of digital exchanges such as thematic focus groups and round tables will be explored.



## 1.3. Using and promoting the Smart Alps Digital Exchange Platform

### Retrospect

The Smart Alps Digital Exchange Platform (DEP) <https://smart-alps.eu/> has been built upon the SmartVillages DEP – developed in the framework of the ASP SmartVillages. Main developers were the smartcommunity partners University of Ljubljana, the Software Competence Center Hagenberg and ADRET, the whole process was assisted by the smartcommunity partners Autonomous Region of Valle d’Aosta and the Swiss center for Mountain Regions. The platform recently went public and opens new opportunities of information, exchange and cooperation. First forums for stakeholder exchange have been launched among which one on municipal, digital platforms that builds on the above mentioned webinar with the same name.

### Perspective

The forums’ utilisation has been up to now limited due to the recent launch and some technical inconsistencies that should be solved in the next weeks. As soon as the technical problems are being solved further promotion of the whole platform and in particular of the forums can be done. The objectif is not only to moderate the forum on municipal, digital platforms but also on other topics of Smart Alps Webinars such as on mobility. The idea behind these forums is to foster communication amongst the members of the network and outside of it and to build capacities on specific topics.



## 1.4. A label for Alpine Smart Villages and Regions?

### Retrospect

From the very beginning, the idea of introducing a Smart Alps label was a topic of discussion. However, the network initially prioritized building a strong partnership and a shared identity before committing to the development of a label. Now, after two years of project implementation, renewed consideration of a potential label is well justified

### Perspective

In spring 2025 a new survey among Smart Alps members has been launched and revealed that a majority of respondents are in favor of the introduction of a label. This means that in the next months evaluations and research will be done on which criterion such a label could be based. The introduction of a recognition system (Bronze, Silver, Gold) for the label will be evaluated. This could increase the engagement of network participants. A logo does already exist since the beginning of the project and will be used for the labelling process.

## 1.5. Establish contacts with experts and researchers.

### Retrospect

Up to now contacts with experts and researchers were established via the webinars and the presential events (study visits and digital Alps Conference).

### Perspective



The Smart Alps Digital Exchange Platform opens new opportunities to bring users, experts and researchers together eg. in the form of forums. Additionally the best practices collection - also integrated into the Smart Alps Digital Exchange Platform - contains valuable contacts to experts and researchers. In the new survey, Smart Alps members would wish to have in addition a list with contacts of relevant experts and researchers. A database on that would be the ideal solution, however its implementation is hardly realistic due to financial limitations. Therefore a list with relevant contacts will be realised in the first place. In a next step partnerships with Alpine universities for research and internships will be sought. This could foster the interest of research centres and universities in joining Smart Alps and at the same time increase the appeal of Smart Alps for municipalities.

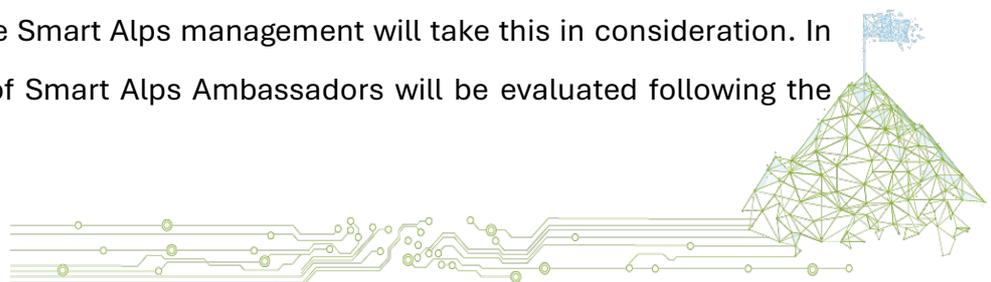
## 1.6. Advocating for the Smart villages / Smart regions approach with public authorities and the general public

### Retrospect

The webinars and the physical events organised have for sure contributed to the visibility of the smartVillages / smart community approach towards authorities and the general public.

### Perspective

The Smart Alps Digital Exchange Platform will contribute advocating to this. The respondents of a survey among Smart Alps members mentioned the organisation of an information campaign with best practices and the collaboration with local medias as measures of advocacy. The Smart Alps management will take this in consideration. In addition the introduction of Smart Alps Ambassadors will be evaluated following the



“Local Heroes” approach <https://blog.ltfe.org/local-heroes-lokalne-face/> extensively used in the SmartVillages project, this could increase the visibility of the Smart Alps network towards different target groups.

## 1.7. Sustainability of the Smart Alps network

### Retrospect

The costs of administration and animation have been born and will be born till end of October 2025 by the SmartCommunity project.

### Perspective

The finances for the administration of the Network are assured by the Horizon SmartEra project. Staff costs and travel expenses of the members/contributors of the Network have to be carried, in general, by themselves. For special activities, which may require a more intense workload, a special budget will have to be elaborated. Adhesion fees are not foreseen for a short and medium perspective. For a long term financing, partnerships with the private and the academic sector will be sought and reflections on a paid membership with exclusive rights will be undertaken. In addition the possibility to create micro-grants for pilot projects for Smart Alps members within the Horizon SmartEra «follower test area call» will be checked.



## Synthesis with key findings

**2.1. The Smart Alps Network is structurally established and growing, with clear membership pathways and evolving governance.**

The adoption of official regulations, establishment of a functioning Secretariat, and the formation of a Steering Board mark strong organizational foundations. Membership is expanding across Alpine countries, and contributors are effectively integrated. Future efforts include formalizing the membership process and broadening representation within the Steering Board.

**2.2. Digital tools and formats are central to effective engagement and knowledge exchange in the network**

Given limited resources for physical meetings, Smart Alps is focusing on enhancing digital participation through webinars, forums, and the Smart Alps Digital Exchange Platform. Webinars - supported by AI translation - have proven effective, and digital formats like focus groups and thematic forums will be expanded to sustain interaction and learning.



## 2.3. Sustainability and visibility are being strategically developed through labelling, expert integration, and long-term financing concepts.

The idea of a Smart Alps label is gaining traction, with next steps focused on criteria development and recognition systems. New strategies include engaging experts via the digital platform, building ties with academia, and potentially introducing Smart Alps Ambassadors. Financial sustainability is to be supported by EU project funds in the short term, with long-term solutions under exploration, such as private partnerships or exclusive paid memberships.

