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Quality of Life as a Compass

A handbook to improve local governance

IMPRINT

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INTRO

INTRODUCTION

Today, municipalities face a wide range of interlinked challenges: demographic change, the climate crisis, increasing pressure on land use, changing mobility needs, social inequalities, either limited access to public services or increasing costs to provide them with scarce financial resources in general. At the same time, municipalities are the political level that most directly shapes people's everyday lives. Decisions at local level have a direct impact on how people live, work, move around, spend their leisure time and identify with their living environment. The Alpine region has various specific conditions such as sensitive natural areas, topographical features, seasonal economic structures, and a close interconnection between the environment, the economy and the society, which heavily influences quality of life conditions.

Against this backdrop, the concept of **quality of life** is becoming increasingly important as a basis for policy- and decision-making. Quality of life enables municipalities to consider different political goals, measures and investments under one cross-cutting topic and systematically assess their contribution to the well-being of the population – today and in the future.

WHY QUALITY OF LIFE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL?

Quality of life is a holistic concept that encompasses material aspects such as housing, work, infrastructure and utilities, as well as intangible dimensions such as social relationships, health, safety, participation, environmental quality and cultural identity. The 10th Report on the State of the Alps of the Alpine Convention emphasises that, particularly in the Alpine region, quality of life is closely linked to the responsible use of natural resources, social cohesion and long-term sustainable economic structures. Quality of life is therefore not an abstract goal, but a central cornerstone for sustainable development at the local level, as both are inextricably linked. Sustainable development aims to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the livelihoods of future generations. Quality of life offers a concrete, everyday perspective: it makes sustainability directly tangible for citizens.

Municipalities have key opportunities to actively promote quality of life through spatial planning and local development, mobility services, social infrastructure, education and leisure activities, environmental and climate protection measures, as well as transparent decision-making processes and citizen participation. If quality of life is consciously anchored as a guiding principle of local politics, conflicting goals can be made more visible, priorities can be set more clearly, and decisions can be better justified – both to political bodies and to the population.

WHAT DOES THIS HANDBOOK OFFER?

This handbook supports municipalities in **systematically using quality of life as a compass for political and administrative decisions**. It is practice-oriented and aimed in particular at mayors, municipal councilors and administration staff who are entrusted with a wide range of tasks and often need to operate with limited resources.

The handbook offers:

- a **common basis** for understanding and defining quality of life,
- **step-by-step instructions** on how to integrate quality of life into existing policy- and decision-making processes,
- **practical methods and examples** that are particularly suitable for municipalities in the Alpine region,
- guidance on **weighing up conflicting goals** and setting priorities,
- approaches to **strengthening transparency and citizen participation**.

STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook outlines an ideal process for municipalities that want to use quality of life as a compass for decision-making. The handbook serves as a supporting resource that can be used flexibly – either as a comprehensive guide for the whole process or as a reference for individual steps in the process. The handbook consists of five chapters that each address multiple questions:





Strmec na Predelu, Slovenia
Pina Klara Petrović Jesenovec



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY QUALITY OF LIFE? A DEFINITION.

In the context of this handbook, **quality of life** refers to the perceived and actual living conditions of people in a particular place. It encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions and describes the extent to which these conditions enable people to lead a good, safe, healthy and self-determined life.

Quality of life deliberately goes beyond traditional economic indicators. It refers to all areas of daily life and includes both objective factors – such as infrastructure, services and environmental quality – and subjective assessments, most likely measuring satisfaction among the population. It is not only the services and conditions that are available that are crucial, but also how people perceive, use, and evaluate them.

Over the past 15 years, the concept of quality of life has become increasingly important in public policy. At European level and in many Member States, platforms, indicator systems and monitoring approaches have been developed to make quality of life visible and to observe it systematically. Despite a multitude of definitions and models, there is a broad consensus that quality of life is a **multidimensional and place-based concept** that cannot be uniformly prescribed but must be negotiated and shaped locally.

Quality of life is not a static state, but a dynamic process that evolves with social changes, new challenges and local priorities. The handbook does not view quality of life as an additional task, but as a **framework** that connects, strengthens and strategically aligns existing municipal activities.



SEE THE LIST ONLINE
[HTTPS://WWW.ALPINE-SPACE.EU/PROJECT/GOVQOL/#MORE](https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/govqol/#more)

USEFUL TOOLS

USEFUL TOOLS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF BETTER LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF QUALITY OF LIFE

The tools are linked to the chapters of this handbook. They provide a basis that can be adapted to your local needs in order to support implementation.

CHAPTER 1

- **ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF QUALITY OF LIFE AS A CONCEPT FOR POLICY MAKING**
A short presentation to introduce Quality of Life as a valuable tool for policymaking at the local level.

CHAPTER 2

- **TABLE WITH INDICATORS FOR QUALITY OF LIFE**
A selection of suggested indicators to support your local Quality of Life analysis.
- **TEMPLATE FOR A CITIZEN SURVEY**
A ready-to-use survey template to help gather residents' views and experiences on Quality of Life in your local context.
- **AI PROMPT TO EVALUATE RESULTS**
A practical AI prompt to support the interpretation and evaluation of results from your local Quality of Life analysis.
- **STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS FOR A WORKSHOP**
A suggested workshop structure with guiding questions to help discuss Quality of Life findings and local priorities with stakeholders.

CHAPTER 3

- **AI PROMPT TO SUPPORT SETTING OBJECTIVES**
A practical AI prompt to help translate Quality of Life findings into clear and locally relevant objectives.
- **EXCEL FILE FOR ANALYSING TRENDS, SETTING OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITISING**
A working Excel template to help analyse trends, define objectives and prioritise measures for your local Quality of Life strategy.

CHAPTER 4

- **TEMPLATE FOR AN ACTION PLAN**
A structured template to support the development of a clear and practical action plan for implementing your local Quality of Life objectives.

QUALITY OF LIFE AS A CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC

1

1 WHY DOES QUALITY OF LIFE WORK AS A COMMON THREAD?

Every day, municipalities face decisions with far-reaching consequences: should they invest in infrastructure or supply the social services? How can climate protection, economic development and affordable housing be reconciled? And how can scarce resources be used in such a way that they benefit as many people as possible – including people living in larger metropolitan areas, benefitting from ecosystem services and the Alps as recreational area.

The concept of quality of life offers municipalities an overarching framework for systematically answering such questions. Quality of life acts as a cross-cutting topic under which different policy areas like transport, health, housing, and others, are brought together. It helps to avoid viewing measures in isolation and instead assesses them according to their contribution to the well-being of the population – today, and in the future.



Bassano del Grappa, Italy
Pina Klara Petrović Jesenovec

2 WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE?

Quality of life is the result of the interaction of many factors. The 10th Report on the State of the Alps shows that it does not depend solely on income or economic growth, but on the specific living conditions on the ground and how they are perceived by the population.

The key contributors to a high quality of life include in particular:

ACCESS TO SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST: Healthcare, education, childcare, nursing care, social services, security and administration must be accessible to all population groups, especially in remote and rural areas.

QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE: Well-developed and maintained transport routes, safe town centres with public green spaces and an efficient digital infrastructure (broadband, mobile communications) are fundamental prerequisites for participation and economic development.

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY: Reliable public transport and alternatives to individual cars improve quality of life and reduce the burden on the environment and household budgets.

AFFORDABLE AND SUITABLE HOUSING: Housing options for different stages of life and income groups are crucial for social stability and attachment to the place of residence.

LABOUR MARKET AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS: Secure jobs, fair incomes and regional value creation contribute significantly to satisfaction and future security.

LEISURE, RECREATION AND CULTURE: Access to nature, sports, leisure and cultural activities promotes health, well-being and identification with the place.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND MEETING PLACES: Places for formal and informal encounters – clubs, public spaces, neighbourhoods – strengthen social cohesion.

CO-DETERMINATION AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION: Transparent decision-making processes and the involvement of the population increase acceptance, trust and satisfaction with local politics.

“

These factors show that quality of life is a cross-cutting issue. It supports the interaction of different municipal tasks in a meaningful way.

”

3 AREAS OF ACTION FOR QUALITY OF LIFE

In order to systematically integrate quality of life into policy- and decision-making processes, it has proven useful to select a set of areas of action in which your municipality can play an active role. The following five can act as an example for local authorities:

1

ENVIRONMENT:

Natural quality, landscape, biodiversity, air and water quality, and risks from climate change and natural hazards.

2

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES:

Mobility, basic services, health and education provision, digital connectivity and accessibility.

3

WORK AND FINANCIAL SECURITY:

Jobs, income, economic stability and regional value creation.

4

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:

Community, club life, safety, social participation, cohesion and mutual support.

5

GOVERNANCE:

Quality of political processes, transparency, trust in institutions and opportunities to get involved.

“

For municipalities, this structure provides practical guidance: it highlights which living conditions are the most important ones, which areas are affected by decisions and where conflicts of interest or synergies might arise.

”

4 SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FOR MUNICIPALITIES IN THE ALPINE REGION

The Alpine region is not a homogeneous area. It is characterised by strong intra-regional differences that have a direct impact on the quality of life in the municipalities. While some regions benefit from high attractiveness, intensive tourist use and a thriving economy, other municipalities are facing depopulation, ageing and the loss of services, due to their remoteness.

Areas that are attractive to tourists and easily accessible often experience high pressure on the housing market, transport infrastructure and the environment. At the same time, they often have better infrastructure, more job opportunities and a more diverse range of services. Less attractive or peripheral municipalities, on the other hand, are more affected by migration, struggle to maintain supplies, infrastructure and social life, and they have limited financial resources or are dependant on fiscal equalisation.

“

These different starting points make it clear that the challenges in the Alpine region are not the same everywhere. Nevertheless, they affect all municipalities – albeit to varying degrees – and require tailored, place-based solutions.

”

SPATIAL AND INFRASTRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Topographical and geomorphological conditions influence settlement structures, accessibility and infrastructure costs. Long distances to the valleys, scattered villages, limited transport connections and high construction and maintenance costs present many municipalities with major financial and administrative challenges.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL HAZARDS

Rising temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events, natural hazards and questions about future water supply particularly affect Alpine communities. They endanger infrastructure, safety and, in the long term, the attractiveness of the living environment.

HOUSING AND CONFLICTS OF USE

Rising housing costs, the increase in the number of second homes and pressure from tourism are making it difficult for the local population to access affordable housing, especially in the touristically and economically strong regions of the Alpine area. This development is influencing social structures and reinforcing the tendency of younger generations to move away.

MOBILITY AND SUPPLY

Many communities are heavily dependent on individual cars. At the same time, access to public transport and services is limited, especially for older people, young people and those without cars.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND SOCIAL COHESION

The exodus of young people, an ageing population and increasing individualisation pose new challenges for social cohesion. Places where people can meet and functioning community structures are therefore becoming increasingly important.

GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Limited human resources, a lack of small-scale data and low participation make strategic management difficult. However, studies show that life satisfaction is a key factor in trust in politics and democratic participation – and thus also in the scope for action of municipalities.



Gastein, Austria
Pina Klara Petrović Jesenovec



DO YOU KNOW YOUR ALPINE GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS?

Diverse **political systems** coexist in the Alps (from the Federal States such as Austria, Germany and Switzerland to the unitary States such as France and Slovenia, with the uniqueness of Italy with its regional system) enducing nuances in municipal jurisdiction. For instance, Germany, Austria and Switzerland experienced territorial reforms which reduced the number of municipalities, leaving those with a large set of mandatory tasks and voluntary tasks, which all contribute to quality of life. While in France, municipalities with less than 15,000 inhabitants have the obligation to join with other neighbouring municipalities forming “communautés de communes”. Such joint municipal administration is also possible in Slovenia, however, municipalities decide for which tasks it should be. In consequence, the single municipality has less jurisdiction and limited ares of responsibility, which makes changes for an improved quality of life a joint effort.

Furthermore, the **administrative framework** of each Alpine country is very different due to the history, leading to differences in how the policy- and decision-making are divided among the administrative levels, and on which level the most quality of life relevant political decisions are made. More to that, also the size of municipalities varies, the average number of inhabitants in single municipalities can range from a few hundred in France to nearly 10.000 in Slovenia, meaning that there governing power might not be the same across the Alps.

5 GETTING STARTED: GAINING SUPPORT FROM POLITICIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS

The support of political decision-makers and administrative staff is crucial for the successful implementation of measures to improve the quality of life in the local community. This also facilitates the involvement of other stakeholders and strengthens acceptance throughout the community.

CONVINCING ARGUMENTS AND RELIABLE DATA

In order to make informed decisions, decision-makers need concrete information. It is important to collect **facts and arguments** that demonstrate the ecological, social and economic benefits of improving quality of life.

These include, for example:

- positive impacts on health, mobility and leisure opportunities;
- economic impact such as greater attractiveness for businesses and skilled workers;
- social benefits, e.g. stronger neighborhood ties or strong voluntary work.

You will learn simple methods for analysis and data evaluation in Chapter 2.

ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING POLITICAL GOALS

Measures to improve quality of life should be linked to **local political priorities** – e.g. climate targets, social participation, health promotion or economic development. This is because quality of life is not an additional task, but an overarching, cross-cutting topic.

It helps communities to

- take a holistic view of complex challenges,
- set priorities transparently,
- highlight and weigh up conflicting goals,
- justify decisions in a comprehensible manner,
- and actively involve the population.

EARLY INVOLVEMENT OF RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The involvement of citizens, associations, businesses, social organisations and other interest groups is crucial to building support. Broad participation makes it easier for decision-makers to recognise the **importance of quality of life** and prioritise measures. It can help to select a responsible person or a small team and gradually add thematic working groups.

You can find out how to achieve citizen participation and transparent decision-making in Chapter 5.

SUCCESS STORIES AS PROOF OF IMPACT

Examples from other municipalities show that projects to improve quality of life can deliver **practical, measurable results**. This is why this handbook includes several good examples from Alpine municipalities, for you to benefit from their experience.

“

As a cross-cutting topic, quality of life supports municipalities in securing their particular strengths, addressing weaknesses in a targeted manner and actively shaping the future.

”



PRACTICAL TIP 1:

WHAT DOES THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY OF LIFE MEAN FOR MAYORS?

Quality of life as a cross-cutting topic does not mean creating new tasks, but rather consciously aligning existing decisions with a common goal. Maybe there is already a strategy for your municipality or region that is close to the quality of life-concept, e.g. a LEADER strategy which often includes areas of action that are closely linked to quality of life.

In concrete terms, this means:

- When local council decisions are taken, ask the question: how does this decision affect the quality of life of different population groups?
- Investments are prioritised according to where they make the greatest contribution to better living conditions.
- Conflicting goals (e.g. between tourism, housing and nature conservation) are openly identified and weighed up on the basis of sound reasoning.

Conclusion: Quality of life provides decision-makers with a comprehensible basis for argumentation – both internally and externally.



PRACTICAL TIP 2:

QUALITY OF LIFE IS MORE THAN A FEELING

Quality of life is often equated with subjective well-being. In municipal practice, however, it is a **controllable and measurable concept**.

- It is based on specific areas of action such as mobility, housing, supply, environment and participation.
- Many aspects can be captured using existing data, indicators and local assessments.
- Quality of life complements traditional indicators (e.g. economic data) but does not replace them.

Conclusion: Quality of life combines figures, experiences and political goals to form a common basis for decision-making.

GOOD PRACTICE

MOOSBURG MAKES YOU CHEERFUL – AND HAPPY



WHAT: Quality of life as an umbrella policy

WHEN AND WHERE: SINCE 1990S AND STILL ONGOING; CARINTHIA/
AUSTRIA

LINK: <https://www.moosburg.gv.at/>
<https://zumglueck.jetzt/>

DESCRIPTION

In the early 1990s, the municipality of Moosburg faced declining vitality in its village centre, infrastructure weaknesses and increasing building vacancies. In response, the municipality, together with the local association zumglück. jetzt, launched the initiative “Happiness Community” (Glücksgemeinde Moosburg). The concept uses quality of life as a guiding principle for local development and revitalisation of the village center. Over time, Moosburg implemented several projects, including the redevelopment of vacant buildings, the creation of a multifunctional community centre (“Schallar”), the establishment of Campus Moosburg as a shared event and education space, and the installation of a Happiness Parcours in the village centre. A connecting element of all those different projects is citizens’ participation and the support of their „Ortskernkümmerei“ (= village caretaker). Moosburg has been recognised as a LEADER flagship project and has received several national awards, including Austria’s most family-friendly municipality in 2022.

OBJECTIVES

The initiative aims to revitalise the town centre, strengthen local identity, improve access to services and shared spaces, and integrate quality of life/ well-being as a cross-cutting principle in municipal development.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

Moosburg shows how a clear vision can connect infrastructure renewal, social initiatives and community engagement. By combining centre revitalisation with education, culture and participation, the municipality has strengthened social cohesion, improved local services and enhanced overall living conditions. Moosburg demonstrates well, how quality of life can serve as a practical strategy for sustainable local development.

GOOD PRACTICE

VALPOSCHIAVO – A DATA INFORMED VISION FOR QUALITY OF LIFE



WHAT: Local development as driver for quality of life

WHEN AND WHERE: NEW STRATEGY 2023-2040, SWITZERLAND

LINK: <https://valposchiavo.ch/de>

<https://smartvalleybio.ch/visualizzazioni-paesaggio/>

DESCRIPTION

Poschiavo has been recognised with the Wakker Prize 2025 for its exemplary approach to local development in a peripheral Alpine valley. Poschiavo is a role model for small municipalities in finding local solutions for global challenges and with that maintaining a strong community spirit and a vibrant liveable place. Sustainable tourism, local heritage and ecological farming are the three main drivers for their local development and numerous certifications as well as Swiss and European funded projects are used as instruments to test new and innovative solutions for their valley.

One example is the Valposchiavo Smart Valley Bio-project, a sustainable development model supported by the Swiss federal authorities. It uses an innovative community hypermap (Ipermappa) and landscape visualisations to collect, organise and present knowledge about landscape values, local practices and future aspirations for the region. The hypermap integrates participatory inputs from residents and local stakeholders along with spatial data such as agricultural zones, heritage sites and natural landscapes. It also includes the Vision Valposchiavo 2040, a series of future-oriented landscape scenarios that illustrate how agriculture, leisure and tourism can coexist in a sustainable way, blending tradition and modernity.

OBJECTIVES

Poschiavo's approach aims to safeguard quality of life by preserving cultural and natural heritage, promoting local economic and social vitality, and engaging residents in shaping shared futures. The Smart Valley Bio project in particular strives to record and transmit landscape values across generations, support sustainable regional development and lay the groundwork for possible future certifications tied to landscape stewardship.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

By using both quantitative indicators and participatory data, Poschiavo makes quality of life measurable, visible and rooted in local experience. The various projects, certifications and strategy development allow Poschiavo to translate community values and environmental realities into concrete policy decisions, strengthen social cohesion, protect local identity and guide long-term sustainable development.

[illegible]

STEP 1

ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

Measuring quality of life is not an easy task, since there is no common terminology across the Alps – in your country you might be more familiar to the concepts of „well-being“, „welfare happiness“ or „life satisfaction“. Before setting goals or launching measures, municipalities need a clear understanding of their current situation. This chapter supports you with carrying out your own quality of life analysis to identify strengths and weaknesses and understand your citizens' needs.

2

1 UNDERSTANDING THE STARTING POINT

A quality of life analysis combines **objective data** (living conditions) with **subjective perceptions** (how residents experience those conditions). Both perspectives are necessary: data show structural conditions, while citizen feedback reveals how these conditions are perceived.

“

Good decisions start with a shared understanding of the local situation.

”

The purpose of analysis is not to create complex reports, but to provide municipalities with practical insights for prioritising action.

2 DEFINING RELEVANT QUALITY OF LIFE TOPICS

Quality of life covers many aspects of daily life. Municipalities should select topics most relevant to their local context rather than trying to measure everything. For Alpine municipalities, experience shows that the following topics are particularly relevant:

1. **Access to services of general interest**, specifically in remote and rural areas (i.e. healthcare services, education, police, postal services, social security, etc.)
2. **Quality of infrastructure**, including roads and internet connectivity
3. **Public transport** and high dependence on car mobility
4. **Access to housing** and opportunities for long-term rental options
5. **Labour market conditions**
6. **Leisure activities**
7. **Places for** both informal and formal **social interaction**
8. **Public participation in policy-making** and democratic engagement

Grouping these aspects under broader areas of action — environment, infrastructure and services, economic security, social relations and governance — helps to structure the analysis and later on summarise findings across different indicators. After identifying the most relevant quality of life topics, it is useful to present them visually, for example through diagrams or symbols representing each topic.

“

A focused analysis is more useful than an extensive but unused data collection.

”

The next step, after defining the topics of quality of life, is to decide if you are interested in an objective picture about quality of life in your municipality or if you want to have subjective information as well. Objective factors offer information about living conditions as they are in your municipality while subjective perspectives describe how satisfied citizens are with their living conditions and their life in general. Lastly it is important to repeat your analysis on objective and subjective factors and include a time dimension, because peoples' perceptions can change over time as their priorities and goals shift and thus influence their experience of quality of life.

3 WORKING WITH DATA

Most relevant data are already available through national or regional statistical portals (use the list below). These portals are done in the way that publicly available data can be downloaded in various forms, most common one is in the .xls table. More to that, the statistical portals usually offer various types of graphic representation of the data we are looking for. When searching the data, we need to know the following variable:

- **the spatial/administrative unit:** usually expressed with abbreviations, like NUTS2 or NUTS3 for region, or LAU1 and LAU2 for lower units, like districts and municipalities;
- **the time frame/period:** usually expressed in years, months, very rarely the data is also available by days;
- **the content to represent.**

For certain aspects of quality of life, especially the environment and the spatial matters, the data is not always available or is available in the form of maps, and needs to be processed with geoinformatics systems. For this, if your municipality has no spatial planning department or an expert, an external GIS expert should be hired to calculate the data for your specific territory and needs. Such data is important and relevant since it provides a spatial dimension to your analysis, and is important for monitoring the infrastructure, traffic, land use etc.

“

But be careful: it is really easy to get overwhelmed. Municipalities should focus on selecting indicators that are meaningful to them, rather than collecting large amounts of data. Data should support decisions, not complicate them.

”

START SIMPLE



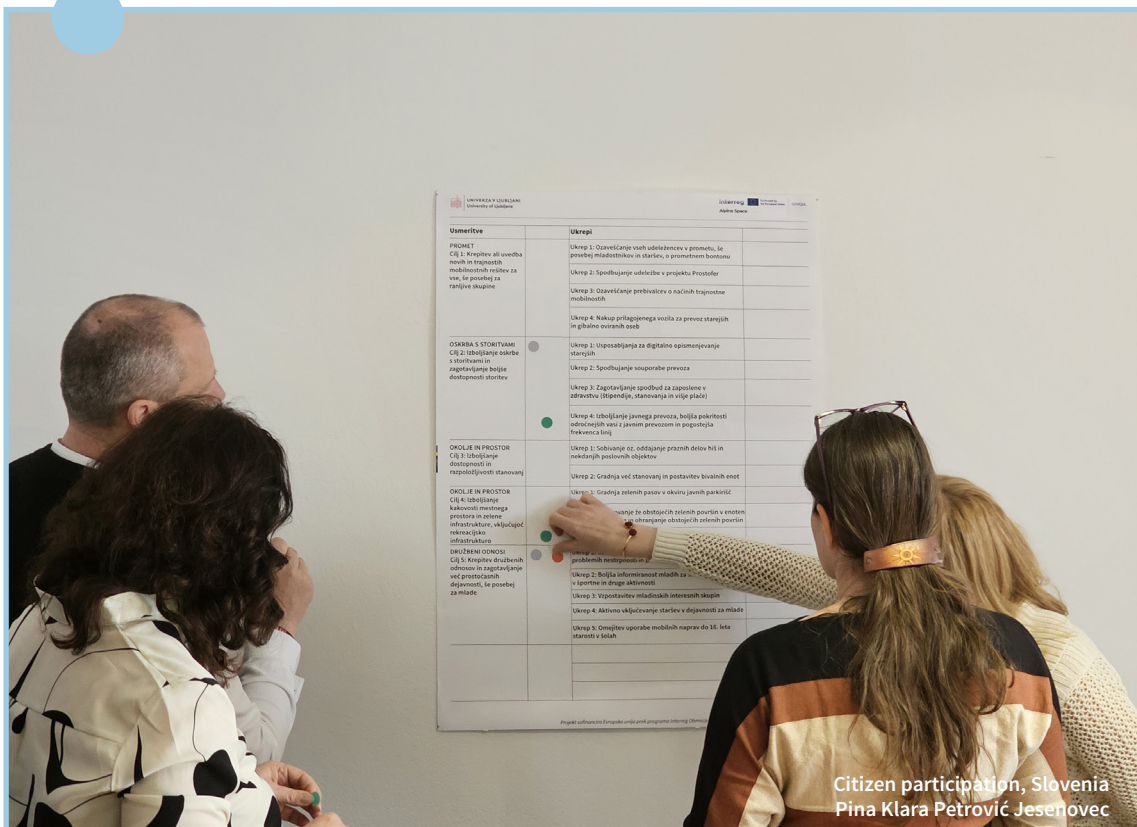
START SIMPLE

Municipalities do not need complex studies to begin their journey working with data.

Start with:

- available statistics,
- municipal administrative data, such as demographic info, housing and land-use data, economic data, etc.,
- citizens' feedback and
- local knowledge of staff and stakeholders-

Analysis can become more detailed over time.



Citizen participation, Slovenia
Pina Klara Petrović Jesenovec

4 QUALITY OF LIFE SPECIFIC DATA PLATFORMS

QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS (EUROSTAT):

This platform offers an overview of nine topics: 1) material living conditions, 2) productive or main activity, 3) health, 4) education, 5) leisure and social interactions, 6) economic and physical safety, 7) governance and basic rights, 8) natural and living environment, and 9) overall experience of life. Both objective and subjective indicators are presented, covering both the objective situation and subjective perceptions. Data is available at the national level for EU countries (Eurostat, n. d.).

OECD REGIONAL WELL-BEING

The platform measures eleven topics, including income, jobs, housing, health, access to services, environment, education, safety, civic engagement and governance, community, and life satisfaction. Data is available at the NUTS 2 level and is presented through infographics, showing how each region scores in each quality of life topic. It also enables comparisons among regions and shows which regions score similarly (OECD, n. d.b).

HOW ARE WE DOING IN AUSTRIA? (WIE GEHT'S UNS IN ÖSTERREICH)

Since 2012, the Austrian statistical office (Statistik Austria) has been tracking progress and quality of life in Austria and publishing annual reports. It combines around 30 indicators covering topics such as overall quality of life, environment and material conditions. This also represents how Austria is progressing towards the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Statistik Austria, n. d.).

LIVING WELL IN GERMANY (GUT LEBEN IN DEUTSCHLAND)

The Federal Government prepared a total of 46 indicators covering twelve quality of life topics to present the current state and development of quality of life in Germany at the NUTS 3 level. The topics covered are health, work, education, income, and work-life balance (called Our Lives); safety, solidarity, and sense of belonging (called Our Environment); and economy, environment, equality, and responsibility (called Our Country). Moreover, the platform provides interactive representations for each indicator (The Federal Government, n. d.).

It is also important to know that some statistical offices do occasionally even quality of life-specific studies, which can also provide you with the respective data, and might put your area into the broader context. Sometime funding projects include studies on quality of life or certain aspects of quality of life and it could be valuable for your work in the municipality to be involved as pilot sites. Examples of such studies are:



A study on the subjective perception of QoL among the population on South Tyrol (Bausch & Tauber, 2023)



the Erasmus+ Alpine Compass project exploring QoL of youth in the Alps (Čataković et al., 2024)



the ESPON TQoL in the Alpine Space Study (ESPON, 2024)



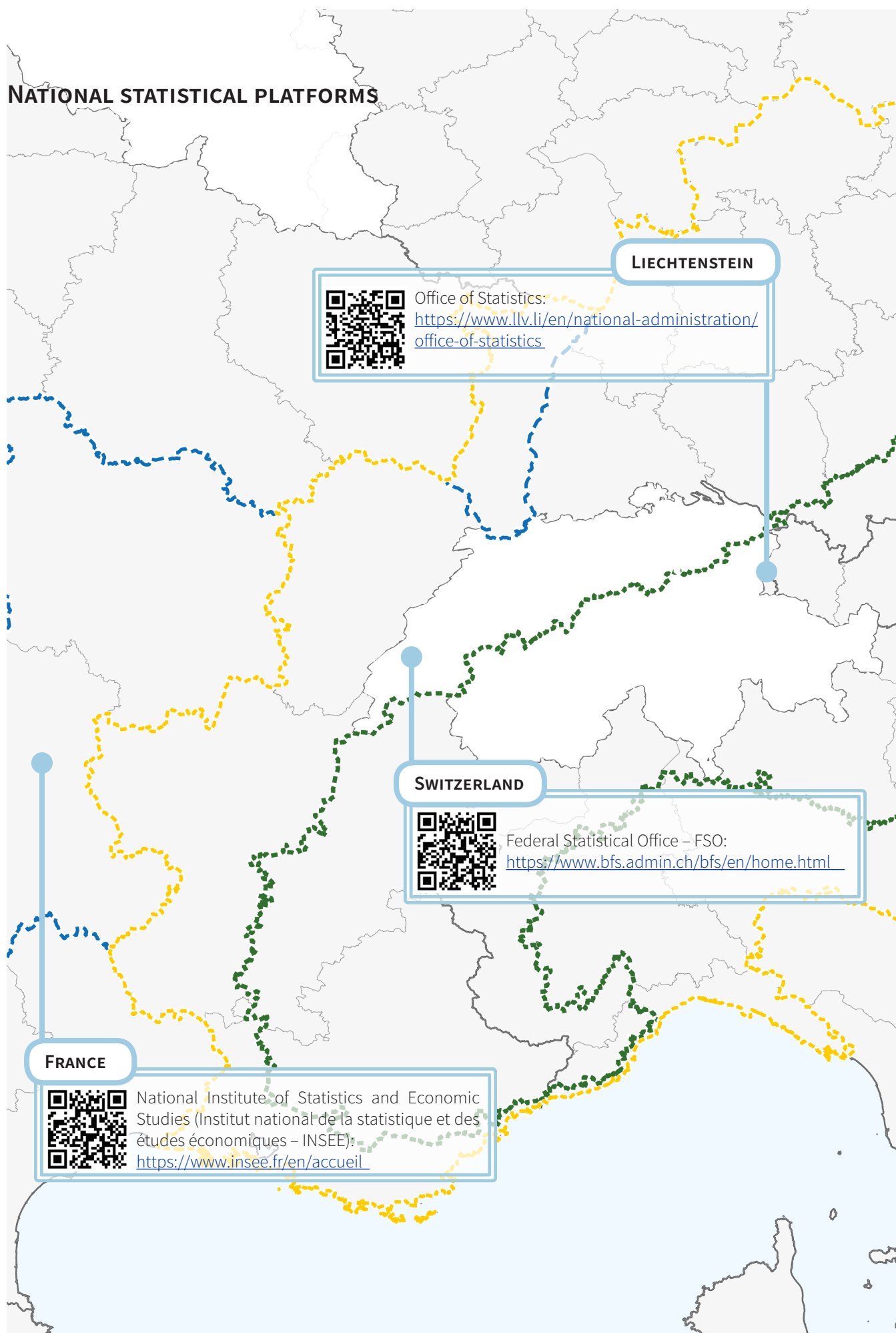
Interreg Germany-Austria cross-border projects "Life Value in the Alpine Region"(Lebenswerter Alpenraum) dealing with sustainable tourism practices supported by local population and regional policymakers (Interreg project, n.d.)

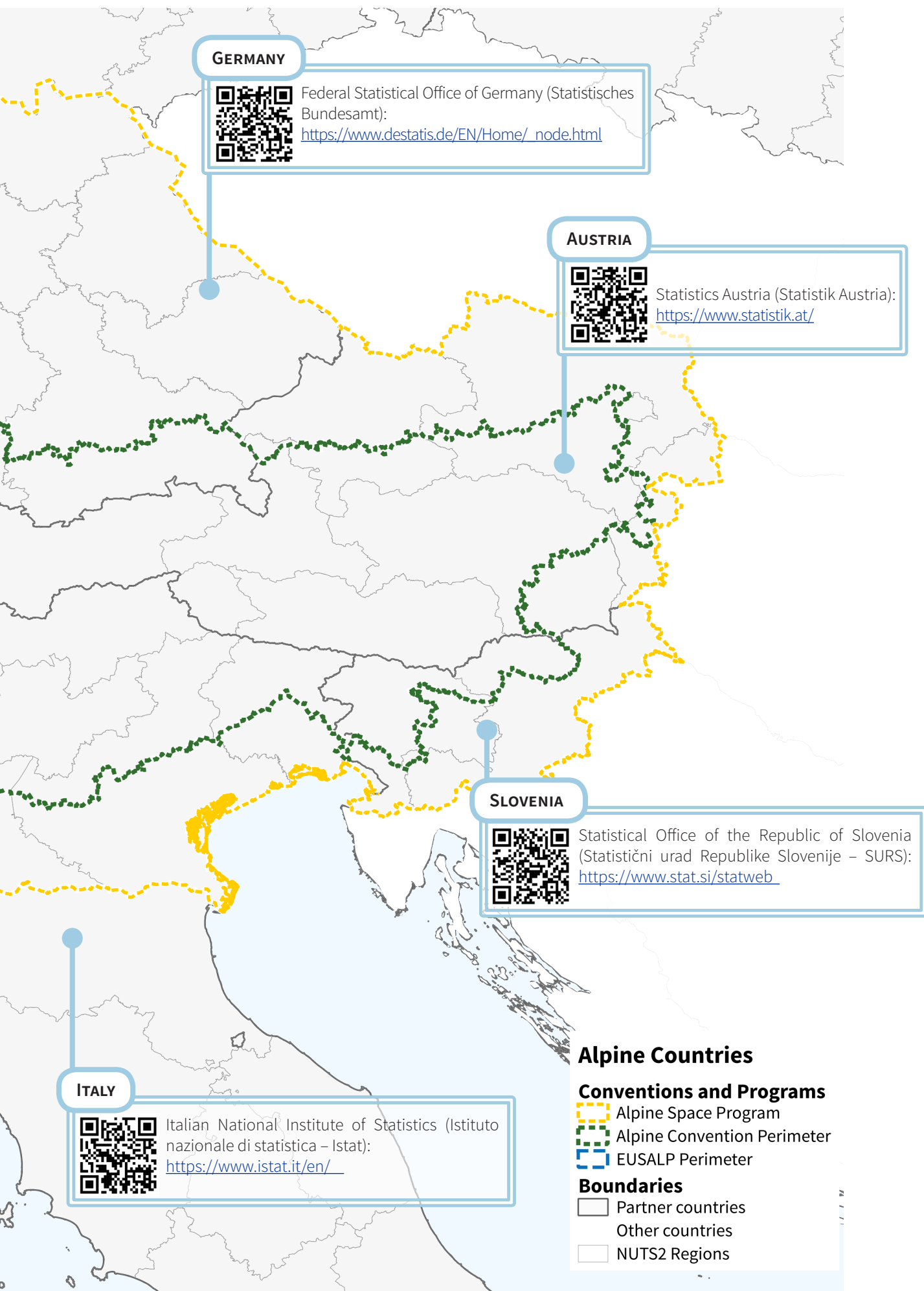
5 HOW TO PRESENT YOUR DATA?

After collecting your data, you might end up with a big table that isn't informative for your purposes. To present your data, for instance in the municipal council or a town hall meeting, you need to be able to present the data in a convincing manner. Nowadays, multiple tools exist that can assist you with the preparation of your charts and infographics, you could even use AI to select the right type of charts based on the data that are analysed.

- **Spatial data** could be presented using maps (e.g., presenting distance to services of general interest) or by presenting the spatial distribution of data, such as satisfaction with quality of life across different regions.
- Charts could be useful for presenting shares of the population expressing **different levels of satisfaction** (e.g., satisfaction with environmental aspects) or for listing factors contributing to quality of life.
- Tables could be used to represent **lists of selected quality of life topics and indicators**.
- A pie chart or bar chart is typically used for **nominal data** and a bar chart for **ordinal data**.

NATIONAL STATISTICAL PLATFORMS



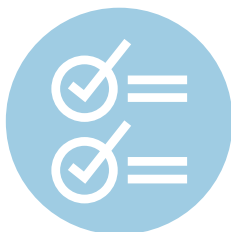


6 INCLUDING CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVES

It is important for municipalities to start working with data, but statistics alone cannot describe quality of life. Participatory methods help understand residents' satisfaction with their life, their perceptions, needs and priorities. Active citizen involvement is not only beneficial for your decision-making, but also contributes to a high quality of life as you can read in the last chapter of this handbook.

You can choose from various methods to involve your citizens and get their perspective. You should select your method depending on target group, its size and characteristics but also your resources:

A SURVEY



Municipalities often use surveys to understand how residents perceive their quality of life. The simplest approach is to ask people how satisfied they are with their living conditions. More detailed surveys can also ask about specific topics such as infrastructure, access to services, work conditions or mobility.

Before launching a survey, municipalities should clarify three key questions: What do we want to find out? Who should we ask? What resources (time, staff and budget) are available?

Surveys can target the whole population or specific groups, such as young people or older residents. They can be conducted online or in person. Online surveys are easy to organise but may not reach everyone, while in-person surveys require more time and organisation. A typical survey process, including analysis, may take several months, but digital tools can help simplify data analysis and presentation.

A WORKSHOP



Workshops are a useful way to involve stakeholders or the general public in discussions about quality of life. They usually take place over half a day and allow participants to discuss different topics in smaller groups.

Workshops help municipalities to better understand local challenges and work together with participants to identify possible solutions. For example, within the GOVQoL project, workshops were organised with political decision-makers, administrative staff and representatives of local communities to assess the local quality of life situation and identify possible solutions to existing challenges.

A FOCUS GROUP



Focus groups are guided discussions on a specific topic, based on prepared questions. Participants are pre-selected to represent different perspectives within a target group, helping to capture a broad range of opinions.

Usually, two moderators are involved: one leads the discussion, while the other records the main points and results. An example of this method is its use in spatial planning processes in Upper Gorenjska, Slovenia, where focus groups supported demographic analysis and local planning discussions.

AN INTERVIEW



An interview is a structured or semi-structured conversation in which one person asks questions and another provides answers. Interviews usually last between 30 minutes and one hour. In quality of life analysis, interviews are often conducted with key local stakeholders, such as service providers or municipal representatives, to better understand local challenges and governance practices. An interview is selected over a workshop or a focus group if you want to ask more delicate questions and want to provide anonymity as a safe space for honest answers.

For example, within the GOVQoL project, interviews with local community representatives helped assess quality of life conditions, identify main challenges, and explore how quality of life can be better integrated into local decision-making.

AN ESSAY



This is a technique where people are asked to write statements of different length, and describe their opinion, memories, experience on a certain matter. Such a method can be used to reach vulnerable groups, such as children, youth or elderly, or if we want to talk about more delicate matters, concerning quality of life.

A PHOTO-VOICE METHOD



Photovoice is a participatory method in which residents take photos related to a specific topic and briefly explain what the images show and why they are important to make their point.

This method can help municipalities to better understand local perspectives, for example when assessing infrastructure conditions, public spaces, green areas or recreational facilities. An example is VERVE's Photovoice Lab in Belluno, Italy, where this approach was used to explore how people perceive and relate to their local environment.

If you want to learn more about participatory methods, there are many useful resources which go into more detail on how to involve citizens. They can all be applied to your quality of life analysis:



GAYA'S YOUTH PARTICIPATION TOOLBOX:

toolbox on how to include youth in decision making processes in the Alps, including good practices and guidelines –

<https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/gaya/>



HANDBOOK FOR THE CO-CREATION AND PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN ALPINE WINE ORCHARDS:

describing how to set up and carry out the living labs method –

<https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/respond/>



ALPINE CARPATHIAN TOOLBOX FOR PARTICIPATION IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN MOUNTAIN AREAS:

focusing on regional and local stakeholders and on including citizens in the decision-making process –

<https://share.google/zDLb8zcPq2fsyNwGb>



HANDBOOK ON CITIZENS PARTICIPATION FROM THE AUSTRIAN STATE OF VORARLBERG (German only) –

<https://vorarlberg.at/-/buergerbeteiligung>



ASK YOUR CITIZENS

Use:

- surveys for broad population feedback,
- workshops for collective discussion,
- interviews for stakeholder insights and
- focus groups for targeted discussions.

Choose your method based on resources and target groups!

“

Residents are experts of their own living conditions.

”

7 USING CERTIFICATIONS AND EXTERNAL BENCHMARKS

Another way to assess your municipality's current situation and identify areas for improvement is to apply for recognised municipal certifications or join quality initiatives. These programmes provide structured criteria and external evaluation, helping you check where your municipality already performs well and where further progress is possible.

For example, the **Zero Waste Certification** recognises municipalities that successfully reduce waste and supports local authorities with a practical framework to move towards more sustainable waste management. Similarly, the **European Energy Award** supports municipalities in improving local energy and climate policies. It provides a structured management and assessment system that helps to systematically reduce energy consumption, increase energy efficiency and promote renewable energy use. Municipalities receive guidance and external evaluation, allowing them to track progress and gain recognition for their achievements.

Another approach is participation in the **Economy of the Common Good (ECG)** initiative. Municipalities applying this framework assess their policies and activities according to their contribution to the common good, including social justice, environmental sustainability, democratic participation and transparency. The process helps to align local development with social and ecological values while improving overall quality of life.

The **Child-Friendly Municipality Initiative**, supported by UNICEF, promotes healthy and supportive environments for all children and young people. Participating municipalities work to ensure that children have access to social protection, live in safe surroundings and benefit from inclusive local services. Practical guidance on how to become a child-friendly municipality is available through dedicated handbooks; regular monitoring includes feedback from the target group (children and their families).

Municipalities can also join networks such as the **European Network of Family-Friendly Municipalities**, which supports local authorities in developing policies that improve living conditions for families through shared learning, planning and self-evaluation.



OUTCOME OF THE ANALYSIS PHASE

The analysis phase should result in:

- a clear overview of your municipalities' strengths and weaknesses,
- identification of development needs,
- understanding of citizens' perceptions and
- a shared basis for setting priorities.

The results should be presented in an understandable and transparent way to decision-makers and residents.

“

Certifications and networks help municipalities benchmark their progress and learn from others while improving local quality of life.

”

GOOD PRACTICE



CHILDREN IMAGINING THEIR FUTURE VILLAGE IN HAUTE-ARIÈGE

WHAT: collecting citizens' perspective, youth involvement

WHEN AND WHERE: 2020-2021, FRANCE

LINK: <https://cc-hauteariege.fr/plui-h/adenanc-le-village-ideal>

DESCRIPTION

As part of the development of the inter-municipal urban planning and housing plan (PLUi-H), the Communauté de communes de la Haute-Ariège involved children and young people in a forward-looking participation process. 22 school classes — from kindergarten to fifth grade — were invited to imagine what their ideal village would look like in the near future.

Each school worked on a specific topic such as mobility, housing, biodiversity, landscape or public infrastructure. Children expressed their ideas through drawings, models, short films and written responses to a questionnaire. Their contributions were analysed to understand how younger generations envision future lifestyles and community development. Following the project “Adenanc, the ideal village in which we would like to live,” elected officials continued this approach in 2022 by inviting middle school students to share their views specifically on mobility in Haute Ariège.

OBJECTIVES

The initiative aimed to integrate young people's perspectives into spatial planning, gather qualitative insights on future expectations and strengthen long-term thinking in local policy development. It also sought to familiarise children and youth with democratic participation and planning processes.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

By inviting children to imagine their future village, the Communauté de communes collected their personal perspectives which traditional statistics cannot provide. The children's projections were optimistic and creative, but also highlighted clear priorities. Three main topics emerged: the importance of social and community life, the relationship between the village and the wider world, and reflections on how participation itself shapes engagement. By actively listening to children, some fresh insights could be included in traditional planning processes. It strengthened intergenerational dialogue and ensured that long-term planning considers the needs and aspirations of future residents.

GOOD PRACTICE

THE DOUGHNUT DATA PORTRAIT OF GRENOBLE



WHAT: data analysis

WHEN AND WHERE: 2022-2025, FRANCE

LINK: <https://www.calameo.com/read/00419037659dbe7db7ef0>

DESCRIPTION

The city of Grenoble adopted an innovative data-driven approach to assess its current situation and guide long-term development by publishing the Doughnut Data Portrait 2022 as part of its broader “Grenoble 2040” strategy. Doughnut Economics framework developed by Kate Raworth, the city adapted the model to analyse local social and environmental conditions, combining multiple indicators in a visual and systemic overview that highlights where the city stands in relation to both global sustainability boundaries and residents’ fundamental needs. The portrait was created through a structured process of selecting relevant indicators with local departments and analysing data from municipal records, national statistics, and planning documents. The first version (2022) serves as a baseline diagnosis and will be expanded and updated in 2025, with the aim of shaping participatory monitoring and strategic decision-making across policy areas.

OBJECTIVES

The portrait seeks to strengthen evidence-based policy by providing a 360° overview of Grenoble’s current position in terms of ecological sustainability and social well-being. It offers elected officials and municipal departments a common factual basis to prioritise actions, align planning documents and track progress over time.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

Grenoble’s Doughnut Portrait makes complex data accessible and comparable by highlighting gaps between current conditions and desired social or environmental thresholds. This visualisation helps the city to:

- understand where local policies are succeeding or lagging
- align municipal strategies with community well-being and planetary boundaries
- create a shared evidence base for future prioritisation and resource allocation

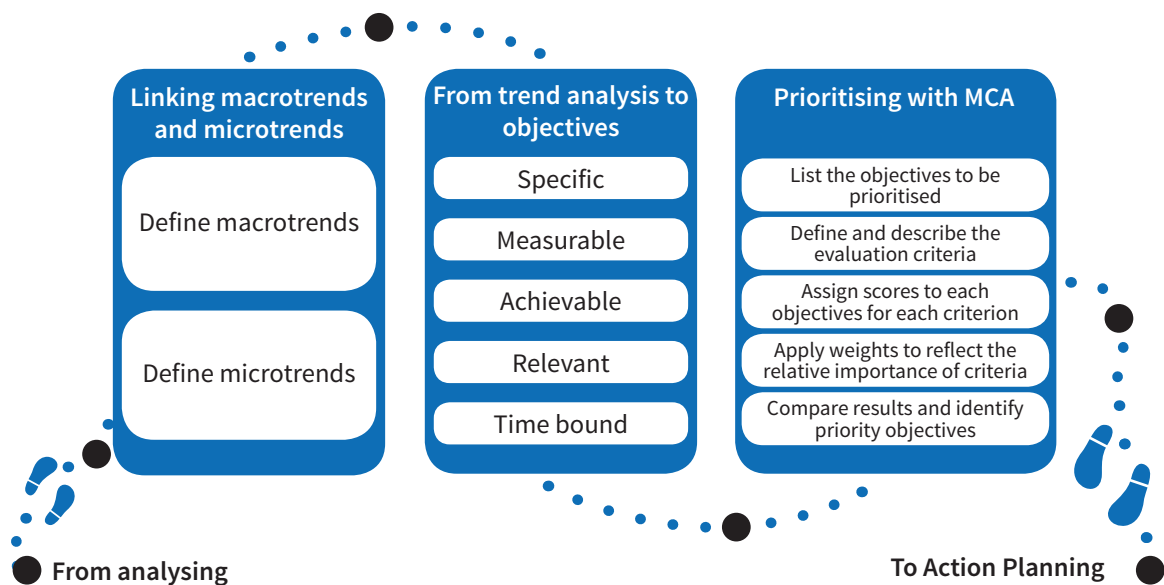
The process of collecting and analysing data has also fostered cross-department cooperation and opened avenues for public engagement, allowing residents and stakeholders to discuss results, refine indicators and track progress. By planning a second portrait in 2025, Grenoble institutionalises monitoring as part of its strategic cycle, strengthening transparency and keeping quality of life at the center of municipal planning.

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STEP 2

SETTING GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Once the starting point is clear, municipalities need to decide where to focus their efforts. This chapter guides you through the process of setting goals and priorities as a key step in translating analysis into concrete and effective action. Goals should address the identified challenges and leverage local strengths. A clear, structured approach helps municipalities to allocate resources efficiently and ensure that policies and measures meaningfully improve quality of life.



3

1 CONSIDERING LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENTS

If you want to develop an effective strategy for your municipality, you require a clear understanding of both macro trends (global and systemic challenges) and micro trends (local and context-specific dynamics). Identifying and analysing these trends helps you to anticipate change, align local action with broader developments and design strategies that are both forward-looking and locally grounded.

“Local strategies are strongest when they connect global trends with local realities.”

UNDERSTANDING MACROTRENDS

Macrotrends refer to large-scale, long-term developments that affect societies across regions and countries. These include, for example, climate change, demographic ageing, digitalisation, economic transitions, urbanisation, and social inequalities. Although macrotrends operate at a global or national level, their impacts are always felt locally.

Some guiding questions are:

- Which are the main macrotrends that could affect quality of life in your municipality?
- How is your municipality expected to be affected by macrotrends?
- How can you prevent or facilitate their impact?

UNDERSTANDING MICROTRENDS

Microtrends reflect the specific conditions, needs, and dynamics of your municipality. They may include local demographic changes, smart specialisations, mobility patterns, access to services, social cohesion, environmental conditions, or governance capacities. Microtrends are often identified through local data, stakeholder engagement, and direct knowledge of the territory.

Some guiding questions are:

- Which are the main microtrends that could affect quality of life in your municipality?
- How can those microtrends be addressed?
- How can you prevent or facilitate their impact?

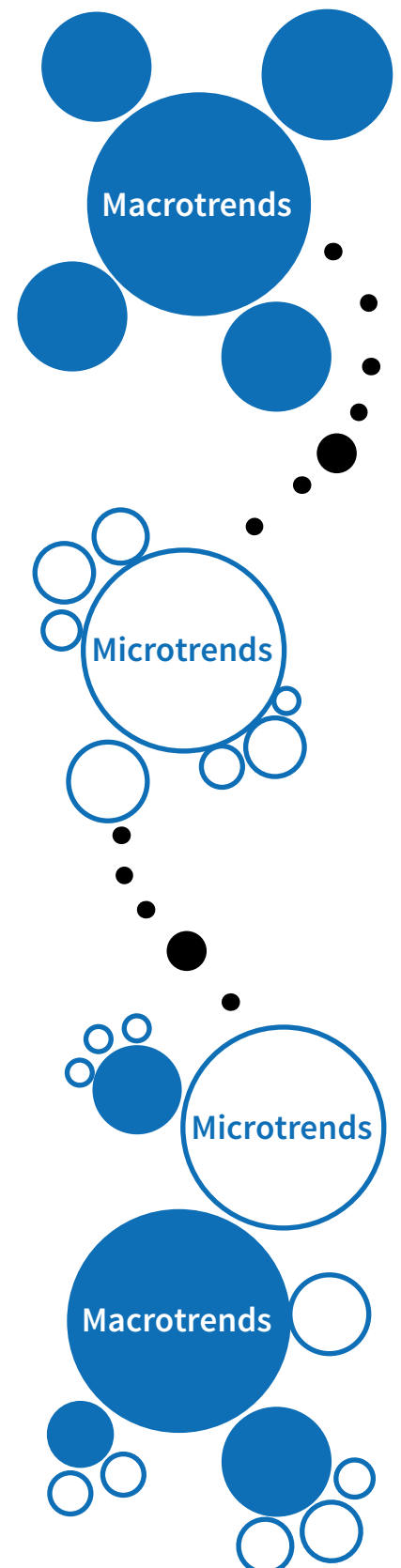
LINKING MACROTRENDS AND MICROTRENDS

Trend analysis helps municipalities connect global developments with local realities. Good local strategies translate broad challenges into solutions that fit your municipality's specific situation.

For example, climate change is a global trend, but the local consequences differ from place to place — such as heatwaves, flooding or water shortages. Understanding how global trends affect your municipality helps you plan measures that respond to local needs.

By systematically identifying and combining macro- and microtrends, decision-makers can:

- prioritise strategic objectives more effectively,
- develop coherent and future-oriented policies,
- strengthen local resilience and quality of life,
- support evidence-based and transparent decision-making.



2 FROM TREND ANALYSIS TO CLEAR OBJECTIVES

Objectives should be grounded in a solid analysis of the local context as you have learned in the previous chapter. While the purpose of the analysis is to identify the most relevant challenges, opportunities, and gaps between the current situation and the desired future state.

Objectives break down your vision into realistic and achievable steps. An objective should therefore be **SMART**:

SPECIFIC

MEASURABLE

ACHIEVABLE

RELEVANT AND

TIME-BOUND.

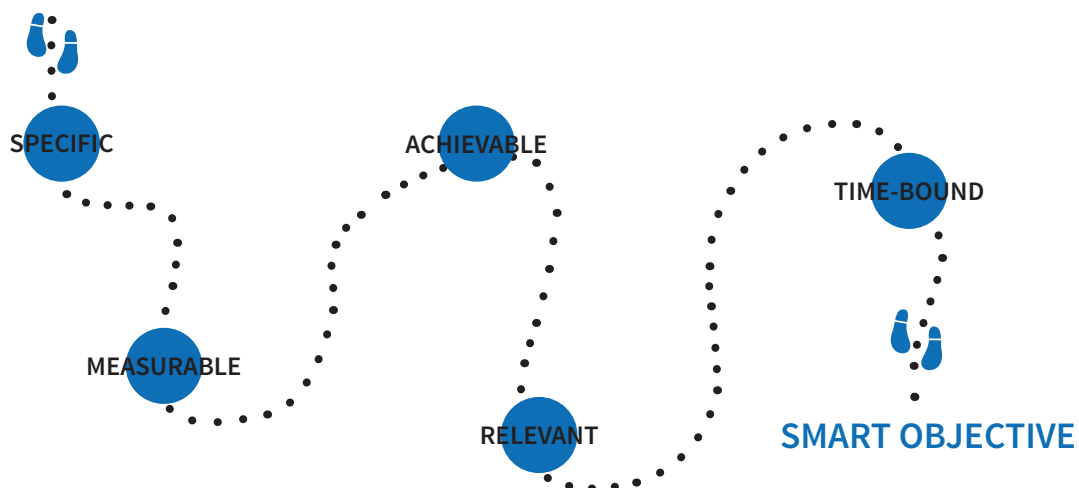


ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

- Which long-term micro and macro trends affect your municipality?
- How will they influence our living conditions?
- Which opportunities and risks might occur if no trends are taken into account?

Features	Description
Specific	Objectives should be clear and specific, leaving no room for ambiguity.
Measurable	Objectives should be quantified, allowing for the measurement of progress.
Achievable	Objectives should be realistic and attainable, considering available resources and constraints.
Relevant	Objectives should be aligned with the overall goals and mission of the organisation of project.
Time-bound	Objectives should have a specific timeframe or deadline for achievement.

STEPS TO



3 HOW TO PREPARE YOUR OBJECTIVES?

Objectives may be formulated through different approaches: they can emerge from community-driven processes or be defined by the public administration.

When setting objectives, it is important to:

ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.

Local knowledge – including collective memory, cultural heritage, traditions, ways of doing, and lived experience – can provide insights that go beyond what quantitative data alone can capture.

PROMOTE CO-CREATION WITH CITIZENS.

Involving residents in defining objectives enhances legitimacy and ownership. While citizens may often focus on specific projects rather than broader strategic goals, their input is essential to ensure that objectives reflect real needs and expectations.

MAKE A SYNTHESIS.

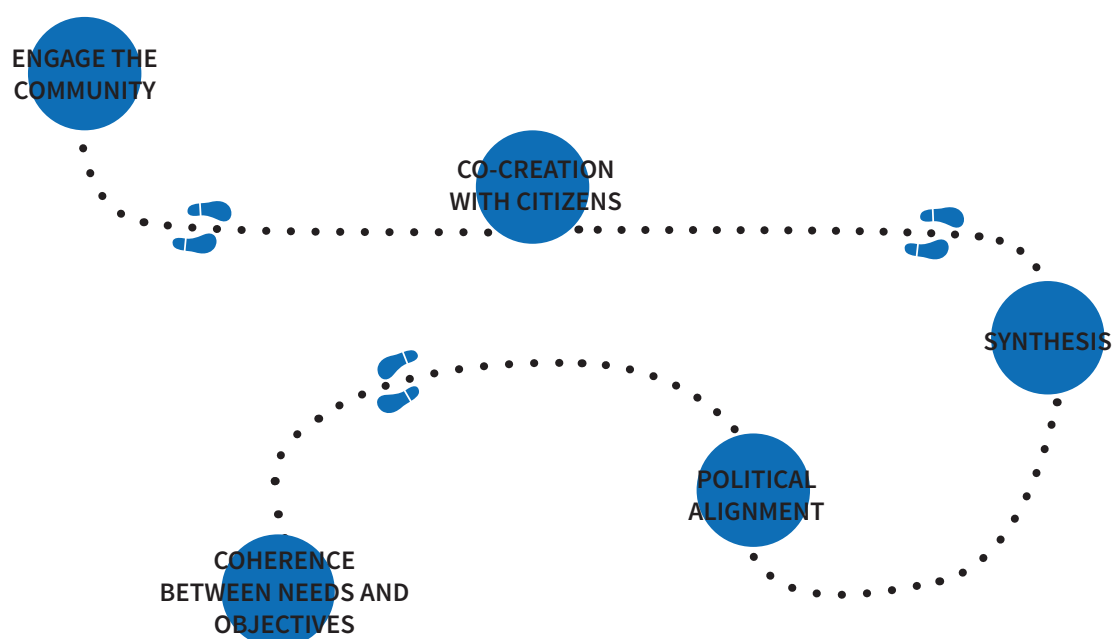
It is essential to extract the key project ideas emerging from the co-creation process and structure them into coherent, mutually reinforcing strategic objectives.

ENSURE POLITICAL ALIGNMENT AND FEEDBACK.

Political commitment is fundamental for feasibility and implementation. Objectives should be prioritised according to the level of political support and institutional backing they receive.

ENSURE COHERENCE BETWEEN COMMUNITY NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES.

Policy coherence in the definition of objectives is essential to ensure that citizens' needs are accurately, clearly, and transparently reflected in the strategic framework. If this alignment is not ensured, the list of objectives may lack legitimacy and fail to be properly recognised by the citizens.



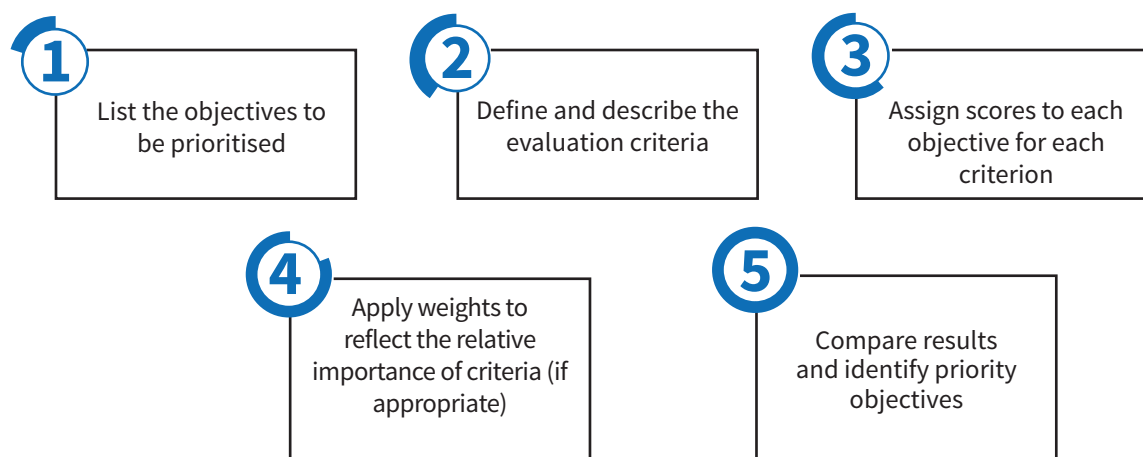
4 PRIORITISING WITH A MULTICRITERIA ANALYSIS APPROACH

Municipal resources are limited, making prioritisation of the goals we want to reach essential. Once objectives have been identified, the next crucial step is to prioritise the most relevant and achievable ones. Given limited resources, time constraints, and institutional capacities, prioritisation helps decision-makers focus on actions that can generate the greatest impact while remaining feasible.

Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) is a method, to compare different options by evaluating them against a specific set of criteria, such as impact, feasibility, cost, urgency or political relevance. Instead of relying on a single factor, MCA considers multiple dimensions simultaneously, reflecting the complexity of your local challenges and quality of life needs. Applying MCA for prioritising, can support balanced and transparent decision-making.

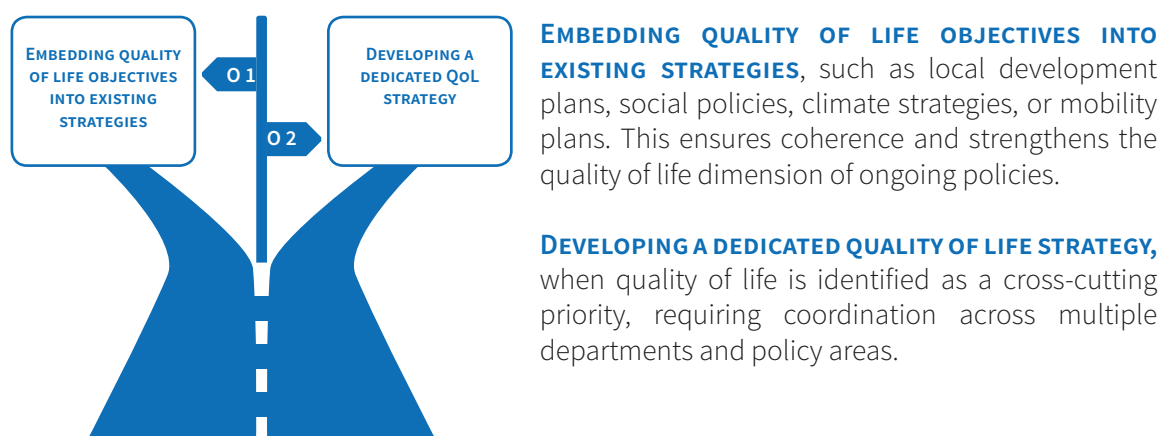
HOW CAN A MCA BE APPLIED TO IMPROVE QoL IN THE POLICY PROCESS?

Follow the flow:



INTEGRATING OBJECTIVES INTO STRATEGIES

After applying the MCA you have ended up with a list of priority objectives. But what should you do with them now? There are two options, you could either include those objectives into existing strategies or develop a new quality of life strategy.



GOOD PRACTICE



MANIFESTO FOR AN INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT OF LAURIANO AND MORANSENGO-TONENGO

WHAT: Territorial Strategy

WHEN AND WHERE: 2024, ITALY

LINK: <https://www.latomo.it/home>

DESCRIPTION

The Manifesto for Integrated Territorial Development of Lauriano and Moransengo-Tonengo is a strategic document developed within the LATOMO project to define a shared, medium- to long-term vision for two neighbouring municipalities facing common demographic, economic, and social challenges. It is grounded in a participatory process involving local administrations, citizens, associations, and territorial stakeholders. The Manifesto promotes an integrated and inter-municipal approach to development, recognising that territorial challenges transcend administrative boundaries and require coordinated responses. It focuses on key areas such as local development, culture and tourism, sustainable mobility, active citizenship, and governance.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the Manifesto are to counteract depopulation and the decline of local services, strengthen the local economy, and enhance territorial cohesion. It aims to valorise natural, cultural, and social assets, promote sustainable and community-based tourism, support new forms of local entrepreneurship, and improve accessibility and mobility. Another core objective is to establish an open and flexible governance framework that encourages cooperation across sectors and scales.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

The Manifesto promotes better quality of life by strengthening local services, fostering social inclusion, enhancing access to cultural and natural resources, and empowering communities through active participation. By aligning economic development with sustainability, social cohesion, and place-based identity, it supports more resilient, livable and attractive territories for residents and visitors alike.

GOOD PRACTICE

BEYONDSNOW & TRANSTAT: PARTICIPATORY TRANSITION STRATEGIES FOR SNOW-AFFECTED ALPINE DESTINATIONS



WHAT: Territorial Strategy

WHEN AND WHERE: 2022-2025, ALPINE WIDE

LINK: <https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/beyondsnow/>
<https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/transtat/>

DESCRIPTION

The **BeyondSnow** and **TranStat** projects are two collaborative European initiatives addressing a shared challenge in Alpine regions: the decreasing reliability of snow due to climate change and its impact on local communities that depend on winter tourism. Both projects, funded under the Interreg Alpine Space Programme, from 2022 to 2025, involved partners from multiple Alpine countries.

BeyondSnow worked with ten Pilot Working Areas across six countries to strengthen socio-ecological climate resilience of snow tourism destinations. Through participatory processes, pilot regions co-designed sustainable development paths, alternative future scenarios and transition strategies to adapt to reduced snow cover and changing tourism dynamics. **TranStat** focused on transitions to sustainable tourism in mountain resorts, understood as ski areas integrated with their broader territories. The project established Living Labs to bring together local stakeholders to develop transition scenarios with concrete solutions for sustainable and resilient mountain tourism.

Both projects have in common, that Alpine destinations developed concrete action plans, including clear objectives and priorities. Although, all destinations faced a shared challenge, their action plans are totally unique and measured to their local situation, which shows the importance of understanding local data and microtrends as a foundation for setting goals.

OBJECTIVES

Both projects aim to support Alpine destinations in anticipating and adapting to snow loss driven climate change, maintaining attractiveness and quality of life for residents, redefining tourism and local development in more diverse and sustainable ways and creating shared strategies through participatory engagement.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

The participatory Living Labs at the heart of both projects are key to strengthening quality of life in mountain destinations. By involving residents, business owners, tourism stakeholders and policymakers in structured dialogues and co-design activities, the projects ensured that adaptation strategies reflect local needs, knowledge and aspirations. These participatory processes build local ownership, improve awareness of future risks and enhance social resilience as well as economic viability.



STEP 3

PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASURING PROGRESS

This chapter takes you from planning to action: developing measures and implementing them is the key step in actively improving quality of life in your municipality. This chapter provides practical guidance on how you can draw up action plans, collaborate across sectors, use resources efficiently and measure progress.

1 DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

Once you have set and prioritised goals for your municipality, an action plan helps you to determine specific actions, possibly in sub-steps, and assign responsibilities. A structured approach is recommended, but an action plan should be a “living document” and always be adapted to new circumstances:

1

ASSIGN AND PRIORITISE MEASURES: Which steps contribute to the implementation of the previously defined goals? What brings the greatest benefit to quality of life? Which measures can be implemented in the short term, and which require medium to long-term planning? Are there external factors that contribute to the urgency, e.g. funding opportunities or regulatory requirements?

2

ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITIES: Each measure needs to be clearly assigned to a person in charge, ideally one specific person or a department or a project team.

3

CREATE A SCHEDULE: Realistic deadlines and milestones help you keep track of things and allow you to link your action plan to your annual plan. Take into account seasonal characteristics in the Alpine region, such as tourism seasons or weather conditions, and of course regional events such as holiday periods, elections or major events.

4

ASSESS RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS: What financial resources, human resources, technical equipment and external support are needed? What funding instruments do you know of that could be suitable? Don't be discouraged by this point; a rough estimate is sufficient at the beginning.

A clear action plan can be visualised as **a table with a Gantt chart or a roadmap** so that political bodies and administrators can keep track of progress. You can find a template for this in our toolbox.

4

2 ENSURE CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COOPERATION

Quality of life arises at the interface of various policy areas: spatial planning, mobility, environment, economy, social affairs and culture. **Cross-departmental cooperation** is therefore crucial:

PROMOTE INTERNAL COOPERATION:

Regular coordination between offices, departments and project groups. Clear communication channels and defined interfaces avoid duplication of work.

USE EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS:

Local associations, schools, businesses and civil society organisations can contribute expertise, resources and ideas.

DEFINE COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT:

A central coordination team or a quality of life-officer can bring projects together, monitor progress and mediate conflicts.

ORGANISE REGULAR WORKSHOPS AND MEETINGS:

Promote exchange, gather ideas and continuously adapt measures to changing circumstances.



“

Cross-sectoral collaboration increases efficiency, prevents conflicts of interest and enables innovative solutions.

”

3 MANAGE RESOURCES AND USE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Today, municipalities across the board are faced with the challenge of managing limited budgets. At the same time, their responsibilities have grown steadily in recent years, as have the expectations and demands of the population in terms of the quality, availability and professionalism of municipal services. This situation makes it clear that careful and strategic use of resources is not an option, but a necessity.

Forward-looking planning helps municipalities to make the best possible use of existing financial, human and organisational resources, exploit synergies and secure room for manoeuvre. At the same time, it creates the basis for identifying funding opportunities at an early stage, applying for them in a targeted manner and integrating them sensibly into existing measures. The implementation of measures requires financial, human and material resources. Municipalities can approach this systematically:

BUDGET PLANNING:

Set priorities and plan funds for short-, medium- and long-term measures.

DEPLOY HUMAN RESOURCES:

Review internal competences and bring in external experts if necessary. It may also be worthwhile to review the areas of responsibility of municipal employees in order to free up resources for new topics if necessary.

RESEARCH FUNDING:

Many national and European programmes support measures to improve quality of life, mobility, the environment or digitalisation.

EXPLOIT SYNERGIES:

Combine measures, e.g. integrate social spaces into infrastructure projects, take environmental and mobility aspects into account. Especially when it comes to measures to improve quality of life, it is also worthwhile to cooperate closely with neighbouring municipalities, as this allows certain issues to be implemented and financed jointly.

4 IDEAS FOR FUNDING TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE



EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS, e.g. ERDF as a fund for regional development. These include, for example, the programmes for transnational co-operation such as the Interreg Alpine Space Programme or the Interreg cross-border programmes between two countries. These instruments can be relevant when there is a lack of national funding. At the same time, they require administrative staff who are familiar with the management of EU projects or have already been trained, and English is often a prerequisite as the working language.



LEADER FUNDING OR OTHER FUNDING INSTRUMENTS FOR RURAL AREAS are very locally based. They require a regional association of several municipalities, but can support a wide range of measures, provided they contribute to the implementation of a local strategy.



NATIONAL SUBSIDIES for **CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION**, sustainable climate protection or improving biodiversity can, on the one hand, improve safety from natural hazards or allow investment in natural areas; both contribute to improving quality of life.



NATIONAL SUBSIDIES for the **TOURISM INDUSTRY** can enable investment in tourism infrastructure, e.g. hiking trails or leisure facilities, and thus ideally contribute to the attractiveness of a community for locals and visitors alike.



NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS to support development in the municipalities/areas lagging behind, e.g. remote areas etc.



CROWD-FUNDING AND SPONSORING are funding instruments that are especially valuable for community-driven projects. Combined with a high level of citizens engagement, those provide the most flexibility for your ideas and least reporting.

Further funding opportunities in infrastructure and mobility solutions, subsidised housing, social participation, e.g. through neighbourhood management, etc., are usually regulated at national or regional level. It is worth knowing as specifically as possible what you want to implement and how much funding you have already in order to evaluate the appropriate options. Most of the financial instruments work on the co-financing basis. In general, it is important that initiatives aiming at improving quality of life can continue without funding, as projects are usually only intended as a start, but communities must ensure the sustainability of the measures and long-term impact on their own.

5 MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS



CLARIFY RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Once a strategy with an action plan has been decided upon, it should be clearly defined **who is responsible for implementation and monitoring success**. Responsibility here means not only formal competence, but also a specific person or office in the community who keeps track of progress and monitors it.

In practice, this is usually an employee of the municipal administration who is already responsible for the relevant subject area. This person is usually also best suited to set up and continuously maintain a suitable monitoring system, as they are familiar with both the content and the local conditions.



FROM A GOAL TO AN IMPACT: MONITORING ALONG THE IMPACT LOGIC

Municipal strategies and measures usually follow an **impact or intervention logic**:

- First, goals are defined (the desired outcome),
- then measures are defined to achieve these goals.

Systematic monitoring is required to understand whether and how well this logic works. Ideally, this should begin **at the same time as implementation** and accompany the entire process.

Indicators are a key tool for this. They can reflect different aspects:

- **Impact indicators**, which show whether the desired situation is improving (e.g. condition of roads, accessibility of services),
- **Performance or implementation indicators** that record what has been done in concrete terms (e.g. financial resources used, number of measures implemented).

It is important that the indicators are defined during the planning stage and not retrospectively.



GOOD INDICATORS: WHAT MUNICIPALITIES SHOULD LOOK OUT FOR.

The following principles have proven useful when selecting suitable indicators:

- **Relevance to objectives and measures:** Indicators must be clearly linked to the objectives and measures that have been set.
- **Measurability and data availability:** It should be clarified in advance how the data will be collected and who is responsible for this.
- **Set baseline values:** All indicators require a starting or reference value in order to make changes visible over time.

“

It is not the number of indicators that is decisive, but their informative value. In practice, a few well-chosen key figures are often more helpful than extensive, cumbersome systems.

”



MONITORING PERIODS AND FORMS

Just as important as the indicators is the definition of the **observation period**. This should be based on the duration of the strategy:

- For measures with a duration of up to five years, half-yearly monitoring is appropriate.
- For long-term strategies, annual or multi-year (e.g. every three years) reviews are often sufficient.

There are various models available for carrying out monitoring:

- **Internal monitoring:** A person or team within the municipality takes on the ongoing observation. This is particularly efficient if this person or team was already involved in the development or implementation of the strategy.
- **External evaluation:** After a certain period of time, an external expert or institution is commissioned. This can lead to a more objective assessment, but requires the municipality to prepare the information well.
- **Shared responsibility:** Responsibility for monitoring is distributed among several stakeholders or institutions. These report regularly to the main responsible body in the municipality.

The form chosen depends on the scope, complexity and available resources.



USING MONITORING RESULTS

The result of monitoring is usually a **report** that shows:

- The extent to which the set goals have been achieved,
- Which measures have been implemented and which have not,
- Which financial and other resources have been used.

This report is more than just documentation. It is a key management tool and also forms the starting point for the next planning phase – whether this involves further developing an existing strategy or drawing up a new concept. Monitoring thus becomes an integral part of learning, future-oriented municipal action.



GOOD PRACTICE

LIVING ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY “OUR BAD HINDELANG 2030”

WHAT: Municipal and tourism strategy including monitoring

WHEN AND WHERE: SINCE 2018, GERMANY

LINK: <https://www.marktbadhindelang.de/unsere-gemeinde/gruess-gott-in-bad-hindelang/lebensraumkonzept-2030>

DESCRIPTION

The municipality of Bad Hindelang developed the long-term strategy “Unser Bad Hindelang 2030” (Our Bad Hindelang 2030) to respond to key local challenges such as tourism pressure, traffic, housing needs and the preservation of natural resources. The concept was created through a broad participatory process involving a survey with around 3.500 responses, workshops and stakeholder dialogue. It serves as a cross-sector guiding framework for municipal development, linking tourism, environment, mobility, economy and social cohesion under one shared vision. A central element of the strategy is its structured monitoring process. After five years of implementation, the municipality conducted a formal interim review to assess progress and adjust priorities where necessary.

OBJECTIVES

The concept aims to balance tourism and local quality of life, strengthen regional value creation, improve mobility and infrastructure, preserve the natural environment and ensure that municipal development reflects the needs of residents. At the same time, the strategy establishes a clear commitment to regularly reviewing progress and maintaining transparency in implementation.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

The monitoring process is a key strength of the Bad Hindelang approach. In the interim review, implemented measures were systematically documented and presented in a structured and transparent way. The municipality assessed:

- WHICH MEASURES HAD BEEN FULLY IMPLEMENTED
- WHICH WERE STILL ONGOING
- WHICH REQUIRED ADJUSTMENT
- WHERE NEW PRIORITIES HAD EMERGED

The review was discussed jointly by the municipal council and advisory bodies in a structured workshop format. Visual summaries and clear status indicators helped make progress understandable and measurable. The evaluation also included reflection on cooperation structures, participation processes and the effectiveness of individual measures. By conducting this structured interim evaluation, the municipality ensured that the strategy remains dynamic rather than static. Monitoring allowed decision-makers to realign priorities, allocate resources more effectively and maintain public trust through transparency. Bad Hindelang shows that regular and structured interim reviews are essential to keep long-term strategies effective, transparent and adaptable.

GOOD PRACTICE

RUGGELL IS UNICEF CHILD-FRIENDLY MUNICIPALITY



WHAT: External certification for strategy development and monitoring

WHEN AND WHERE: SINCE 2018, LIECHTENSTEIN

LINK: <https://www.ruggell.li/unicef>

DESCRIPTION

Ruggell was the first municipality in Liechtenstein to receive the UNICEF “Child-Friendly Municipality” certification. First awarded in 2018, the label was extended in 2022 for another four years, reflecting sustained progress in implementing children’s rights at the local level.

Submitting an application for recognition led Ruggell through a structured process defined by UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein. This process included analysing the local situation, hearing children and young people on issues that matter to them, defining actions and evaluating progress before certification and re-certification. Children and families were actively involved, for example by sharing their favourite places, preferences and ideas in public events and participatory meetings. Their input was used to shape local measures and to monitor how well the municipality was performing in areas which impacted their lives.

OBJECTIVES

Ruggell aims to ensure that the rights and needs of children are considered in local policies and daily life. The process strengthens cooperation between school, youth services, administration and politics, and supports targeted measures in areas such as play spaces, mobility schemes, early support for families and youth participation programmes. An important part of the process is the interim evaluation and reporting required for continuing recognition. After certification, Ruggell participates in annual reporting and regular reviews with UNICEF, making progress transparent and allowing adjustments to activities if needed.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

The UNICEF certification process in Ruggell connects policy, practice and lived experience by systematically including children and their families in monitoring and evaluation. Children’s opinions about play areas, libraries, mobility or community events are taken seriously and integrated into municipal planning. This ongoing dialogue helps ensure that actions actually match children’s priorities and everyday needs. By tracking results and maintaining children’s voices at the centre of the process, Ruggell strengthens social inclusion, supports family well-being and improves living conditions for all residents.

[illegible]

POLICY

ENSURING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND TRANSPARENT POLICY- MAKING

Citizen participation in the Alps could be seen as a natural part of local governance as small-scale and tightly knit communities traditionally make the social material of the Alpine regions. People also tend to stick together as “important” decisions are often made outside the Alps, whether it be in the capital city or even more remotely in Brussels.

For centuries now, mountain communities have been forced to govern together in order to share resources, resolve land conflict issues and make the most of the little space they have. Participation is historically anchored in organisations such as commons, agricultural communities, cooperatives, civic communities, etc.

Nowadays, mountain municipalities have a more heterogenous composition, and governance processes have evolved a lot – especially in recent years with the mainstreaming of digital ways of working and communicating. Public participation can take different forms depending on how much influence citizens have on the decision-making process and how transparent the municipality communicates to and with the public. These levels range from simply informing citizens about decisions to empowering them to make decisions themselves. Each level requires different participation methods and preparation, but how can participation and transparent policy-making work practically?

1 RAISE AWARENESS AND GUARANTEE THE INFORMATION FLOW

For citizens to be interested in their municipality’s policy-making and to motivate them to take part in participatory processes, they need to be aware of what’s going on where they live: what are the local projects? What’s the status on any new building project? Has anyone done something innovative in the municipality? What has been going on during the last few weeks?

This first level of public participation can be achieved by providing clear and transparent information to better understand the local issues and policy decision. Citizens are informed about what the municipality is doing, what projects are being planned, and what decisions are being made. This is the foundation of all participation: people cannot participate meaningfully if they are not well in-formed. Clear communication is important to avoid the feeling that municipal decisions are distant or overly technical. Explaining the purpose and expected impacts of projects helps residents better understand local policy-making.

Municipalities can use different communication channels to share information, such as municipal newsletters, websites, social media pages, messaging groups, or local notice boards. Public information meetings and exhibitions can also help explain projects in accessible and non-technical language.

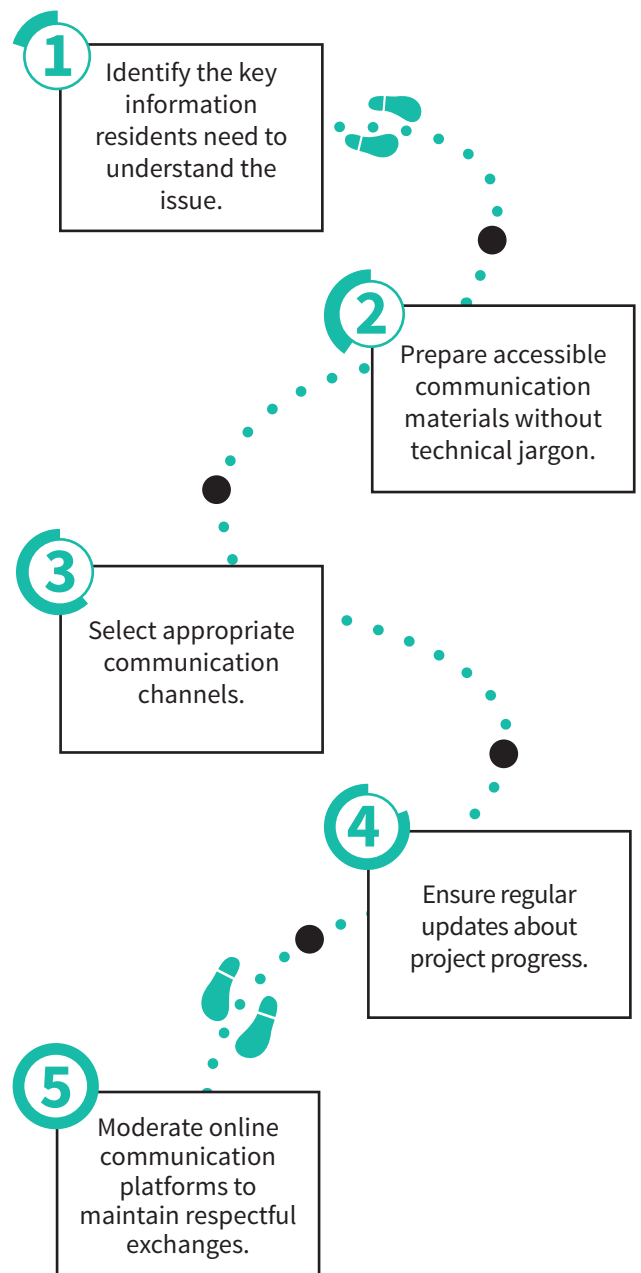


DON'T FORGET TO CONSIDER WHO IS NOT SPEAKING

In small scale municipalities, social pressure can be hard on minorities and less-represented social groups. Welcome the citizens who participate and get involved but don't forget about those who do not have a public voice, for instance children, young people, women, elderly people, single mothers, people bearing handicaps, migrants, etc.

Participatory processes do not ensure representativeness, and you may need to come up with other forms of participation that do not involve public meetings and collective discussion.

STEPS TO RAISE AWARENESS AND GUARANTEE THE INFORMATION FLOW



2 COLLECT CITIZENS' OPINIONS BEFORE MAKING DECISIONS

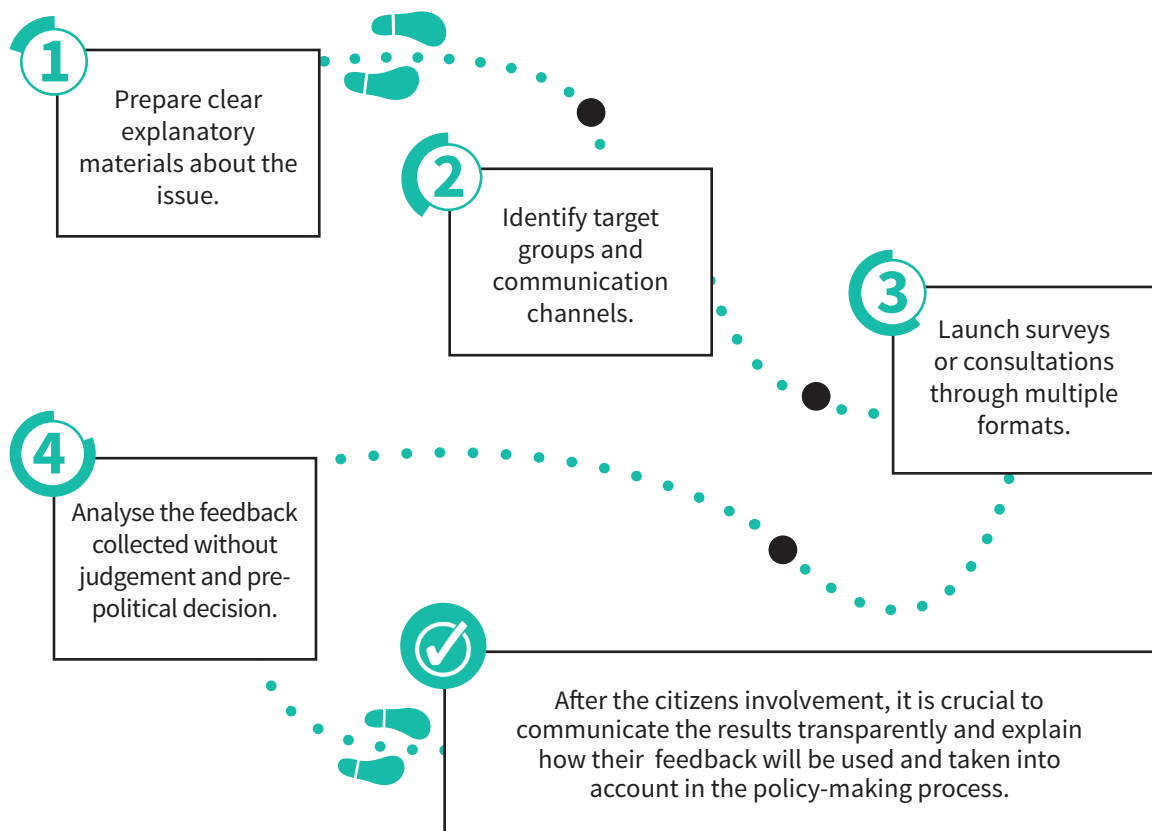
Municipal policy-making can, just as regional or national policy-making, become quite disconnected from people's reality because of several factors, such as use of jargon, making reference to laws and regulations, focusing on technocratic or organisation aspects of any thematic area.

While the municipal decision-makers remain responsible for the final decision, consultation helps to ensure that policies consider the needs and perspectives of residents. Consultation methods should be designed to reach a broad range of residents, including those who may not attend public meetings.

A variety of tools are available and combining them is often key to ensuring a transparent policy-making process. These include surveys or questionnaires (online or paper), public consultations, feedback forms at market stands, public hearings or town hall meetings, and formal comment periods for municipal plans.

STEPS TO COLLECT CITIZENS' OPINION

After you have selected a specific topic or question for which you require citizens' feedback,

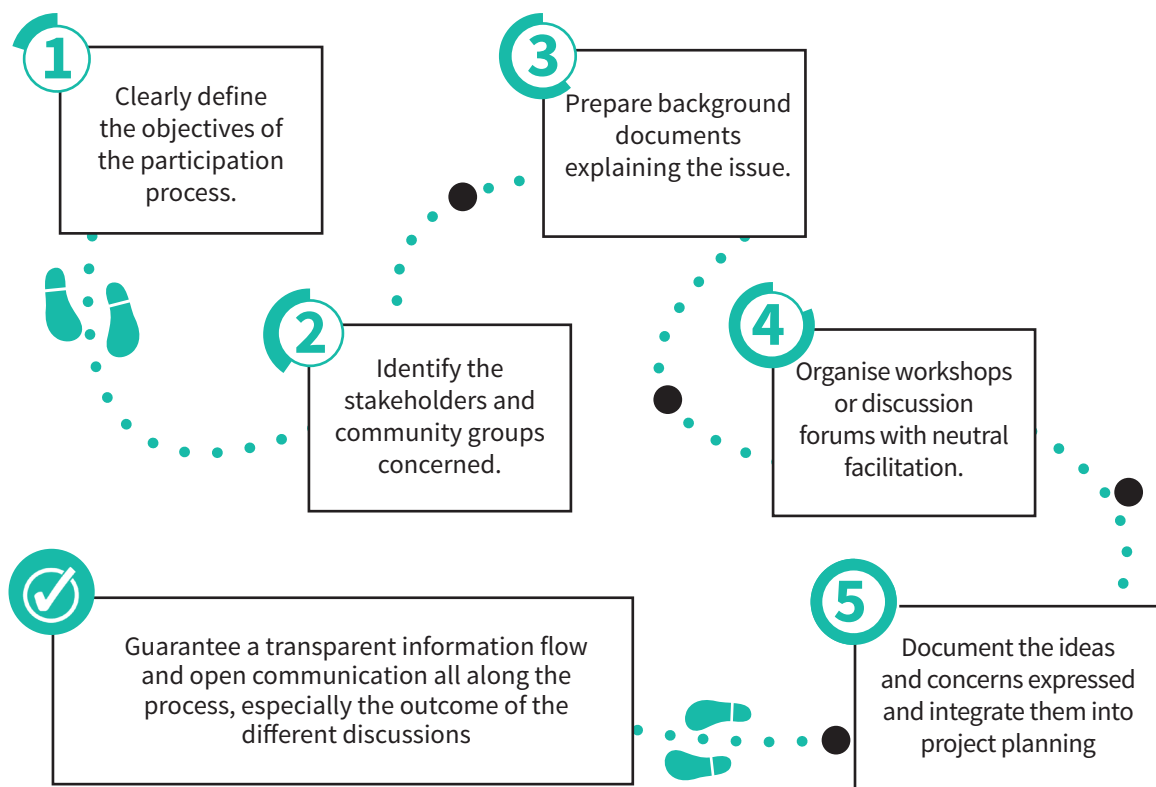


“Plan public meetings carefully: communicate projects in clear, non-technical language and allow sufficient time to discuss their purpose with residents, rather than focusing only on implementation details.”

3 INVOLVE CITIZENS ACTIVELY IN DISCUSSIONS AND IDEA GENERATION

When organising participatory processes in your municipality, ensure that the framework and rules are clearly defined from the outset and communicated transparently to all participants. With this foundation, participation becomes more interactive, transforming the relationship between the municipality and its citizens into a two-way dialogue. This often requires facilitation and more structured formats such as participatory workshops, discussion or focus groups, participatory mapping exercises, thematic citizen groups, and youth councils. These approaches create a space for mutual exchange, where residents can share their views, understand existing constraints, and gain insight into the challenges faced by municipal authorities, while their perspectives are meaningfully integrated into project development. For example, if residents are involved in redesigning the village center, clearly explain the available budget and whether funding is secured for implementation. Especially with bigger projects, not everything can be planned in advance, and unexpected changes may occur. However, transparent communication and honest cooperation strengthen trust in local governance — and trust is essential to encourage citizens to stay engaged in public decision-making.

STEPS TO CREATE A TWO-WAY DIALOGUE

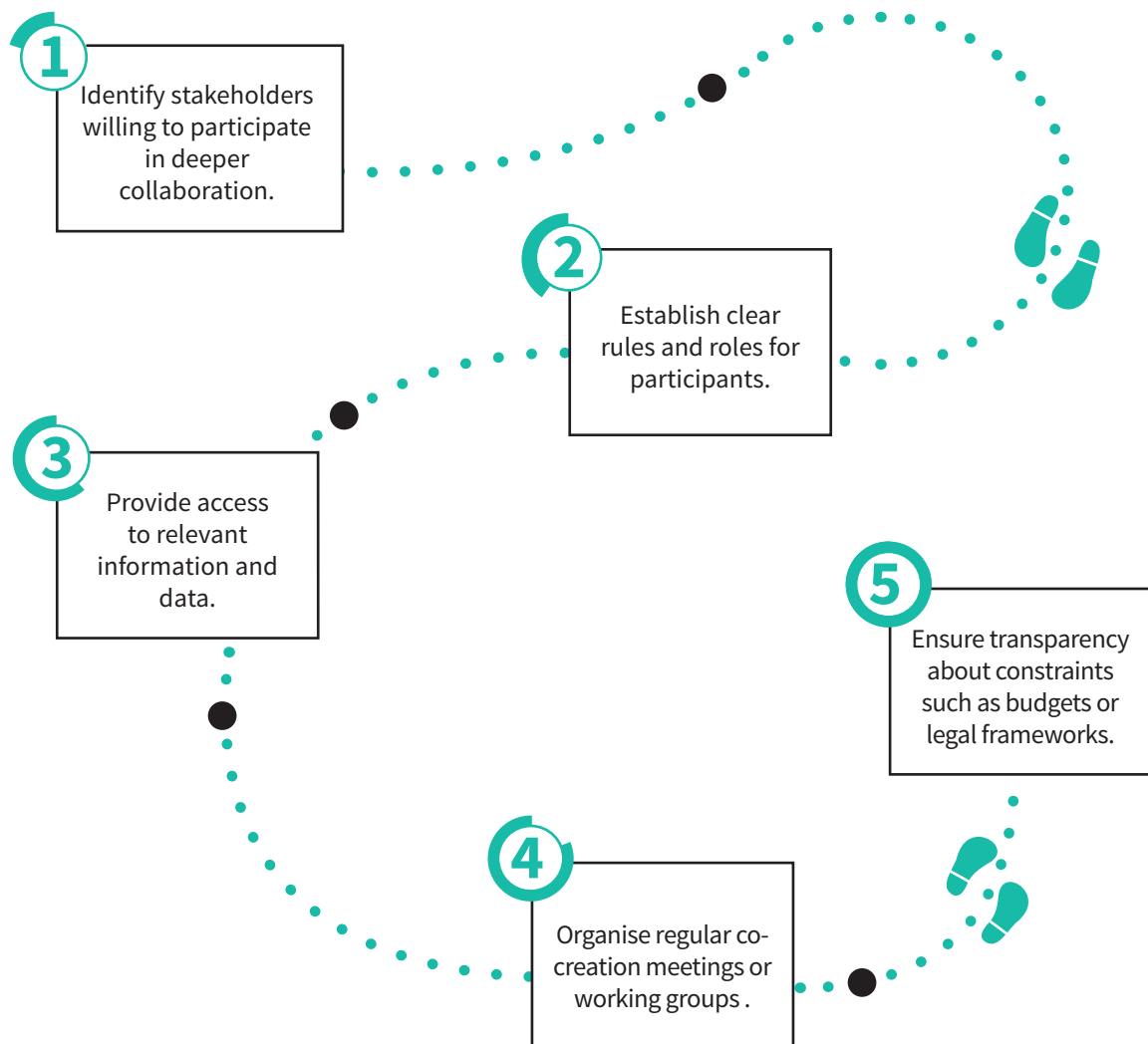


“In participatory consultations or local referendums, participants should also know from the start whether results are binding, partly considered, or purely consultative.”

4 BUILD TRUST IN CO-DESIGN AND COLLABORATION

Sometimes, no matter how much effort you have put into inviting citizens to public meetings, launching public consultations, funding communication channels, good ideas come from citizens who do not wish to take part in the institutional way. Innovative ideas can emerge from informal groups outside institutional processes and can be supported by the municipality by providing meeting spaces, technical advice, or opportunities to present their proposals.

STEPS TO CREATE A GOOD WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND FRAMEWORK

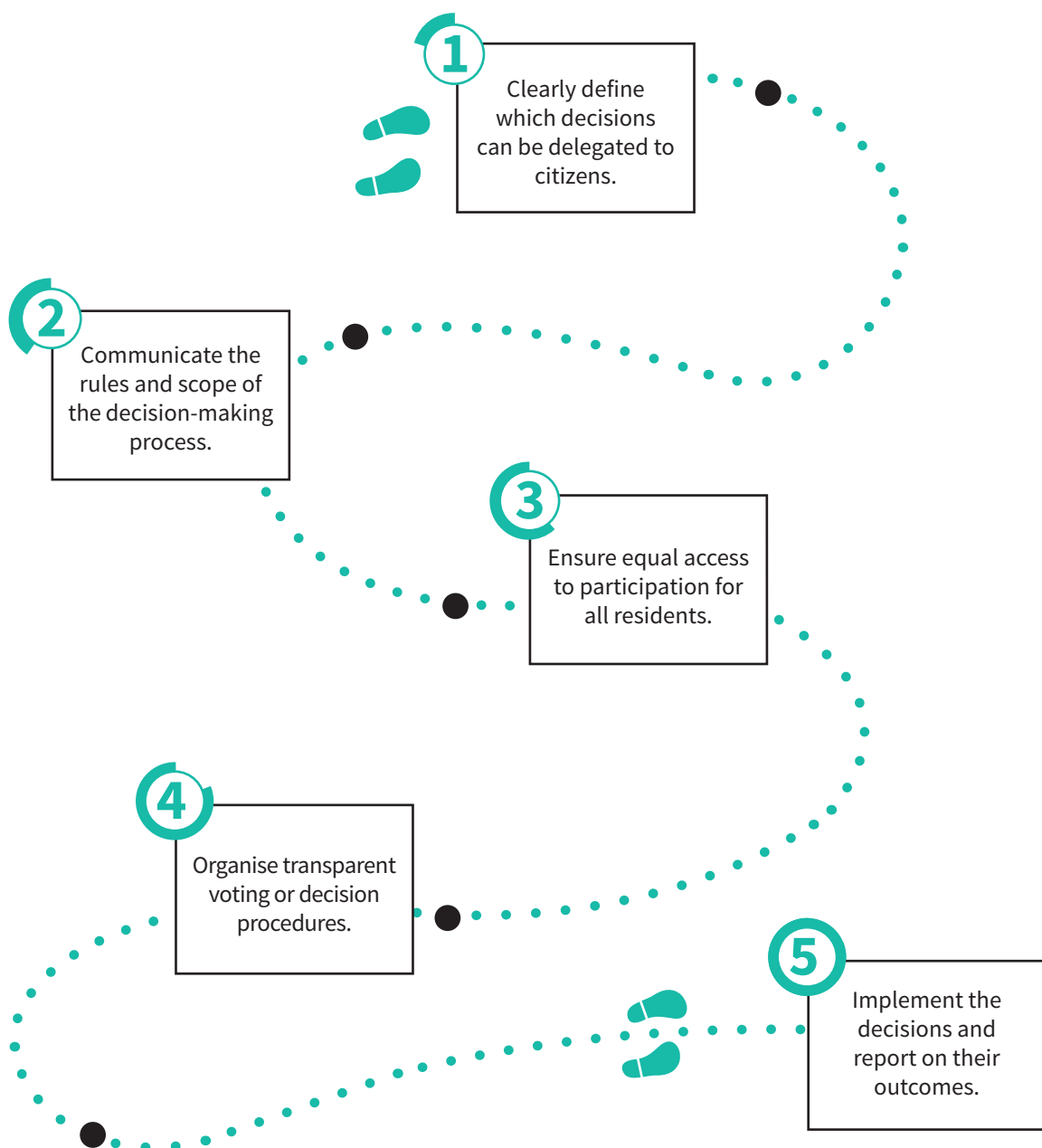


Have the courage to listen to your citizens, welcome them to present their project in front of the municipal council, potentially help them out financially if the budget allows it, and let time do its thing. In case, an idea is brought forward which seems to be “against” your initial plan or strategy, avoid fighting it. Lack of transparency will fuel opposition when you can perhaps benefit from the creative energy: give space for the idea to be presented officially, consider the arguments and be transparent about the reasons which lead you to accept/reject the idea.

5 CO-DESIGN POLICIES AND IMPLEMENT PARTICIPATORY OUTCOMES

By giving your citizens the authority to make actual decisions and committing to implementing their results, your municipality reaches the highest level of participation. Tools such as as participatory budgeting, local referendum, citizens assemblies with decision-making power or community voting on project priorities will help to improve democratic engagement and create a strong sense of ownership among the citizens.

STEPS TO CO-DESIGNING POLICIES



BUILDING A CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation, in a well-designed and inclusive process, strengthens local democracy in many ways — from attending municipal council meetings to contributing to community projects and local events.

Regardless of the level of participation, successful processes require transparency, trust, and an inclusive approach. Municipalities should therefore create opportunities for informal exchange and maintain open dialogue with citizen groups, including those who may disagree with municipal plans. Supporting residents who are willing to invest their time and energy in community life, creating welcoming meeting environments, and encouraging informal exchange after meetings guarantee the sustainability of the citizen engagement. Furthermore, encouraging participation means valuing residents' contributions, supporting citizen initiatives, and creating accessible spaces for dialogue.

Differences of opinion may arise, but they often show that people care about local issues. Municipalities can support constructive dialogue by training staff or facilitators in meeting moderation and conflict management, ensuring that all participants feel heard and respected.



Meeting local associations, France
Pina Klara Petrović Jesenovec

GOOD PRACTICE

PARTICIPATORY BUDGET IN TRBOVLJE



WHAT: Citizens' participation and transparency

WHEN AND WHERE: 2024 AND 2025, SLOVENIA

LINK: <https://www.trbovlje.si/objave/290>

DESCRIPTION

In Slovenia, multiple Alpine municipalities have been implementing the so-called participatory budgets. It is a bottom-up instrument which involves residents directly in municipal spending decisions. Every year, a defined share of the municipal budget is allocated to projects proposed by residents or local communities and neighbourhoods, as well as by local non-profit organisations. After proposals are submitted, an expert committee reviews them against predefined criteria. Eligible projects are then presented for public voting, and residents decide which projects should be funded. Each resident has only one vote which can be limited to the project within their own local community, if the municipality decides to divide its area into smaller areas to proportionately divide the overall sum. The projects that are proposed are most directly connected to improving quality of life, but are of smaller scale, namely between 2.000 and 8.000 EUR. Example of projects, can be benches along the walking paths, construction and renovation of the playgrounds, renovation of public buildings, infrastructure in green areas etc. At the moment, the overall annual budget is set at 64.000 EUR.

OBJECTIVES

The participatory budget aimed to strengthen democratic involvement, increase transparency in public spending and ensure that municipal investments correspond to residents' needs.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

By allowing residents to propose and vote on projects, the municipality created a direct link between local needs and public investment. The process improved transparency, strengthened trust in local governance and supported concrete improvements in infrastructure and public spaces. Participatory budgeting connects municipal resources with residents' priorities and strengthens local democracy.

GOOD PRACTICE

INSTITUTIONALISED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN WEYARN



WHAT: Citizens' participation and transparency

WHEN AND WHERE: SINCE 1993 ONGOING, GERMANY

LINK: <https://gemeinde-weyarn.de/aktive-buerger/buergerbeteiligung/>

DESCRIPTION

The Municipality of Weyarn in Upper Bavaria, with around 3,000 inhabitants, faced several challenges in the early 1990s, including growing migration pressure from nearby Munich, increasing traffic and a lack of social integration. In response, the municipality linked citizen participation to its village renewal and spatial planning processes. The first moderated citizen workshops were held in 1993.

Today, Weyarn's development is based on a structured "two-pillar principle": municipal political bodies on one side and actively participating citizens on the other. Citizen participation is formally anchored in a municipal statute (Mitmach-Satzung), which defines how residents are involved in planning and decision-making. A stable network of citizen-led working groups addresses topics such as youth, mobility, asylum and integration. A full-time participation coordinator ensures continuous communication between the municipal council, administration, steering committee and working groups, and also manages the participatory budget.

Over time, numerous citizen-driven initiatives have emerged, including cultural events, youth workshops, neighbourhood services and thematic planning projects. The municipality even managed to integrate citizens' participation into an investor project for neighbourhood development.

OBJECTIVES

Weyarn's approach aims to strengthen social cohesion, improve integration, manage growth-related pressures and embed citizen participation as a permanent element of local governance.

HOW IT PROMOTES A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

By institutionalising participation and supporting citizen-led working groups, Weyarn has created long-term structures for dialogue and cooperation. Residents actively contribute to solving local challenges and implementing projects, which strengthens trust, social inclusion and community resilience. Weyarn demonstrates how structured and institutionalised participation can become a permanent pillar of municipal development.

[illegible]

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