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GOVQoL

Deliverable 1.4.1:

Report on comparison analysis on the quality of life and the local governance

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
1. Introduction	1
2. Methodological Approach and Implementation.....	2
2.1 Methodological steps	2
2.2 Overview of interviewed local communities	4
3 Analysis and Local Needs	8
3.1 National overview.....	8
3.2 Local needs and territorial priorities emerging from interviews.....	20
Quality of life related factors, challenges and prospects	20
Factors Contributing to quality of life	21
Relevant policies, actions and interventions	24
Obstacles to Policy Definition and Implementation.....	26
Initiatives, Measures, Stakeholders, and Civil Society Involvement.....	28
Monitoring and Evaluation	30
3.3 Workshops	32
Understanding of Quality of life and its challenges	33
Factors influencing the quality of life and its governance.....	36
4. Identification of governance gaps	38
References	41
Annexes.....	42
Annex 1. Questionnaire.....	42
Annex 2: Protocol for Workshop 1	44



1. Introduction

Alpine communities are facing multiple quality of life (QoL) challenges, including population decline in remote areas, rising living costs, housing pressures, reduced services, and increasing climate-related risks such as droughts and natural hazards. These issues are reshaping both the landscape and the daily lives of residents. Despite the urgency, there is a lack of understanding and action on local governance of QoL. The GOVQoL project, long title “*Empowering local governance of Alpine communities for a better quality of life*”, addresses this gap by empowering Alpine communities with tools, knowledge, and skills to consider QoL in policymaking. By strengthening local governance, engaging stakeholders, and fostering place-based solutions aligned with Alpine-wide policies, GOVQoL aims to build local capacity and develop tailored action roadmaps. Through knowledge exchange, the project seeks to promote more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient Alpine communities where QoL becomes a core part of long-term strategies. In short, the general objectives of the project are to:

- Analyse current local governance of QoL,
- Improve the skills of local administrations,
- Empower the governance capacity of Alpine communities by embedding QoL in long-term policymaking,
- Increase stakeholders’ knowledge and awareness of how they can be more sensitive and proactive in considering QoL as a central policy issue.

This is done by organisation of transnational awareness raising seminars (two organised in winter 2026), design and implementation of workshops with local communities to evaluate the state of the art, preparation of 10 place-based roadmaps for how to consider QoL in policymaking, and preparation of a handbook with best practices and governance instruments enabling good QoL.

Deliverable 1.4.1 (also Output 1.1) builds on multiple activities to identify governance gaps and local needs as a foundation for developing place-based policies to improve QoL within the Alpine region. It represents the first major project output and result of the work, done within WP1 - Governance Framework for QoL at the Local Level) and provides the empirical basis for subsequent activities of WP2 - Improving QoL through Better Policymaking, including the final output: the Alpine roadmap. Deliverable 1.4.1 provides evidence and contributes to the project’s overall objective of enhancing multi-level governance capacities and supporting the implementation of macroregional strategies by better understanding the territorial diversity and governance conditions across Alpine regions. The analysis covers five Alpine countries (Austria, Germany, France, Italy, and Slovenia), providing a comparative overview of how local communities deal with QoL within their governance frameworks. The work combines qualitative research with participatory approaches, including interviews with 52 selected local authorities. These interviews provide valuable insights into existing institutional arrangements, coordination mechanisms, and local perceptions of QoL-related challenges. The results form the core of the analysis of governance gaps and local needs, highlighting cross-cutting issues such as limited integration across policy levels, uneven participation practices, and the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive governance models to enhance societal well-being in Alpine territories.

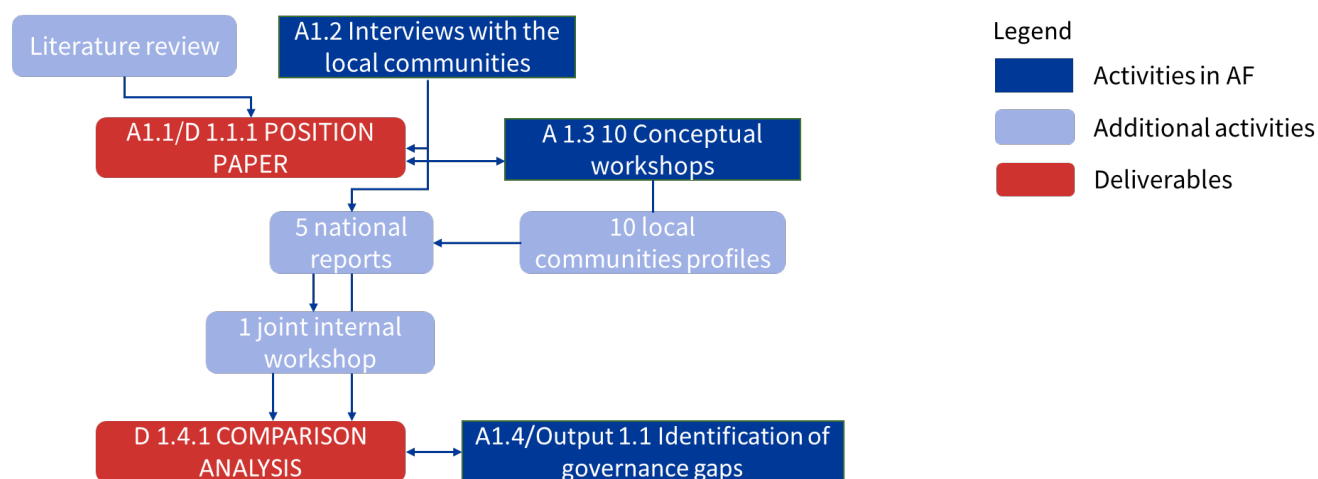
Section 2 of this output presents the methodological approach, section 3 provides the results of the participative efforts and inputs for section 4 which provides the main conclusions and summarizes them.

2. Methodological Approach and Implementation

2.1 Methodological steps

The methodological approach adopted in Deliverable 1.4.1 combines a qualitative, multi-level perspective with participatory tools to engage institutional local actors. The analysis is grounded in a conceptual framework that interprets **QoL as a multidimensional construct** shaped by both **objective living conditions** (services, environment, accessibility) and **subjective perception** of quality of life (sense of belonging, participation, safety, and social well-being). **Local governance**, in this context, is understood as **the set of formal and informal processes through which public and private actors from the local level coordinate their actions to address shared territorial challenges**. Given the complexity of the topic, an integrated inductive–deductive research approach has been adopted. This approach combines findings from a structured literature review with empirical research components, including interviews and workshops¹ conducted with local actors in Alpine communities.

Figure 1: Conceptual and methodological approach (Source: authors' own elaboration)



The empirical core of this output (see Figure 1) consists of a structured interview campaign involving 52 local institutional actors across the five participating Alpine countries (Austria, Germany, France, Italy, and Slovenia). Semi-structured interviews were carried out between May and December 2026, the division across the countries was 10 representatives from each country, except from Slovenia, where 12 people were interviewed. The interviewees represented a wide range of institutions,

¹ This document includes the results of workshop 1 of each pilot (10 in total). The results are presented in section 3.3.

including municipalities, municipal associations, Local Action Groups (LAGs), and other relevant local organisations. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive understanding of policy- and decision-making processes, including coordination and stakeholder involvement in strategic planning and territorial development.

The interview campaign followed a semi-structured format consisting of 12 questions exploring (i) participants' **perceptions of QoL**; (ii) their understanding of the relationship between QoL, governance, and policy; (iii) the tools used to address QoL-related issues; (iv) their implementation and monitoring mechanisms; (v) and the challenges encountered. Participants were also asked about local engagement practices and anticipated future challenges.

In addition to the interviews, intensive work with the local communities was carried out to gather a more in-depth view into the local governance of QoL. For this purpose, two pilot municipalities were selected in each participating country, and a series of three workshops were planned for each local community. The pilot municipalities were chosen to reflect the diversity of Alpine territories, including small municipalities (such as Črna na Koroškem in Slovenia, Lanzo Torinese in Italy, Veynes in France, and Nenzing in Austria), former industrial or logistical centres (such as Ala in Italy and Jesenice in Slovenia), examples of intercommunal governance linked to protected areas (such as Kalkalpen National Park in Austria and Baronnies Provençales Regional Nature Park in France), and villages engaged in LEADER strategies (such as Grassau in Germany).

For Deliverable 1.4.1 the first workshop in the series of three is the most relevant. The goal of this workshop was to discuss the concept of QoL with the local stakeholders, including the challenges with securing a good QoL, and the governance related to it. More in detail, the first workshop objective was two-fold. On one side, it **explores local perceptions of QoL** – Understand how citizens and local stakeholders define and experience quality of life within their community. On the other side, the goal was to **identify key factors influencing QoL**, and recognise the social, environmental, economic, and governance factors that positively or negatively affect well-being in each local community. To ensure comparability of results, a protocol of workshop 1 has been elaborated and implemented (see Annex 2).

Through this methodology, which integrates both theoretical and practical components, the main objective was to develop a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between QoL and governance in Alpine territories. By combining literature review, policy framework analysis, and interactive empirical methods such as interviews and workshops, the research provides a broad understanding of how QoL is addressed by local authorities and perceived by local communities. The outcomes of the interviews and document analysis were synthesised to identify governance gaps — defined as mismatches or deficiencies in regulation and policy, their implementation, the institutional coordination, competences, or participation — and local needs. Taken together, the study highlights governance as both a key dimension of QoL and a central arena through which QoL is shaped at the local level.

2.2 Overview of interviewed local communities

During the interview campaign, 52 interviews were conducted with local representatives from Alpine communities in Austria, Germany, France, Italy and Slovenia (Figure 2). Not only municipalities, but also intermunicipal communities, associations, and various forms of cooperation (particularly local action groups, namely LAGs) were involved in the project to present a broader picture of Alpine communities and their understanding of QoL in governance processes. The sizes of the municipalities show variation, both within and between countries. Using population size as the main criterion for defining the scale of municipalities, those with up to 2,000 inhabitants are considered small, up to 20,000 inhabitants medium-sized, and more than 20,000 inhabitants large (Table 1). Based on this classification, the representatives from the participating countries also show diversity. While Slovenian representatives were mostly from small municipalities, except for Jesenice, the French case studies represent a different trajectory, with territories exceeding 20,000 inhabitants. However, rather than focusing on the municipal scale alone, the French administrative system follows a different trajectory, characterised by intermunicipal structures that connect several municipalities and serve larger populations across extensive territories. Similarly, the Italian case studies include not only small municipalities but also associations and LAGs. Meanwhile, the German and Austrian cases present a more hybrid picture, encompassing all categories.

Accordingly, based on their location and geographical surface, the cities exhibit different characteristics, ranging from rural to urban and hybrid forms. While most of the case studies can be classified as rural or semi-rural areas characterised by low population density, large territorial area, and strong agricultural sectors, with forestry or nature-based activities as primary income sources. These characteristics are evident in municipalities such as Tux, Austria; Bad Hindelang, Germany; Viù and Lauriano, Italy; and Kobarid, Slovenia, which have both vast areas with relatively small populations and higher-than-average population densities. At the same time, some case studies present more urban or compact characteristics, such as Sonthofen, Germany and Jesenice, Slovenia, which host more than 20.000 inhabitants, indicating a more urban structure and a stronger concentration of services, employment, and infrastructure. Some municipalities, such as Ala, Italy and Lanzo Torinese, Italy, represent hybrid profiles, combining compact urban cores with surrounding rural or mountainous hinterlands. Beyond individual municipalities, distinct territorial configurations appear in France, Austria and Italy. In France, inter-municipal communications, or regional natural parks, encompass multiple small municipalities across large areas and emphasise coordinated governance. Similarly, in Austria and Italy, supra-municipal structures such as LEADER regions, inter-municipal unions, and Local Action Groups (LAGs) present cooperative governmental structures.

Table 1 - Overview of the interviewed local communities (source: authors' own elaboration)

Country	Name	Administrative Type	Population	Area (km ²)	Ave. Elevation (m)
Austria	Nenzing	Municipality	6,200	110.2	530
	Koblach	Municipality	4,900	9.7	410
	Mäder	Municipality	3,900	3.4	410

	Ludesch	Municipality	3,700	11.3	550
	Tux	Municipality	1,950	111.1	1,280
	Südkärnten Karawanken ¹	LEADER region in CBC area	94,500	1.881,5	460
	Frastanz	Municipality	6,700	33.7	510
	Kalkalpen	LEADER Region National Park (22 municipalities)	39,040	1,301.18	Between 385 m to 1,963 m
	Hittisau	Municipality	2,224	46.65	915
	Grosses Walsertal	Biosphere reserve (6 municipalities)	3,400	192	1,251
France	Communauté de communes du Diois	Inter-municipal community	11,500	1,450	600
	Saint-Pierre-d'Entremont (Savoie)	Municipality	520	32.5	620
	Communauté de communes Sisteron-Buëch	Inter-municipal community	25,000	1,500	650
	PNR Baronnies Provençales	Regional Natural Park	33,000	1,810	700
	Communauté de communes Pays des Écrins	Inter-municipal community	9,800	462	1,100
	Communauté de communes Alpes Provence Verdon	Inter-municipal community	10,500	958	850
	Saint-Étienne-de-Crossey	Municipality	2,400	14.2	400
	Marie	Municipality	109	14.7	628
	Veynes	Municipality	3,214	42.6	1,101
	Assemblée du Pays Tarentaise Vanoise (APTIV)	Association	n.a	n.a	n.a
Germany	Sonthofen	Municipality	21,000	46.6	750
	Bad Hindelang	Municipality	5,100	137.0	825
	Schleching	Municipality	1,800	66.6	580
	Marquartstein	Municipality	3,200	13.4	550
	Aschau im Chiemgau	Municipality	5,700	80.6	620
	Balderschwang	Municipality	330	41.5	1,040
	Grassau	Municipality	6,910	35.78	537
	Kirchanschoring	Municipality	1,930	1,651	417
	Ramsau	Municipality	1,800	129.18	670
	Übersee	Municipality	8,323	6.61	525
Italy	UNCEN Piemonte ²	Association of union mountain municipalities	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Lanzo Torinese	Municipality	5,000	10.4	525

	Viù	Municipality	1,050	65.2	760
	Ala	Municipality	8,600	119.0	210
	Lauriano	Municipality	1,400	14.1	175
	Dossena	Municipality	966	19.6	986
	Berbenno	Municipality	2,492	6.3	675
	Bollengo	Municipality	2,141	14.22	255
	Unione di Montana della Carnia	Union of mountain municipalities	n.a	n.a	n.a
	LAG of Lanzo, Ceronda and Casternone	Local Action Group (Leader)	n.a	n.a	n.a
Slovenia	Črna na Koroškem	Municipality	3,160	156.0	575
	Jezersko	Municipality	700	68.8	890
	Jesenice	Municipality	21,500	75.8	575
	Bled	Municipality	8,130	72.0	500
	Žiri	Municipality	5,100	49.0	480
	Slovenj Gradec	Municipality	16,500	173.7	450
	Radovljica	Municipality	18,900	118.0	480
	Kobarid	Municipality	3,800	192.0	240
	Bohinj	Municipality	5,200	333.0	510
	Ravne na Koroškem	Municipality	11,000	63.4	410
	Rečica ob Savinji	Municipality	2,200	30.0	380
	Gornji Grad	Municipality	2,600	90.0	450
¹ It includes 22 municipalities					
² It includes 52 Unions of Mountain Municipalities and for a total of 553 municipalities					

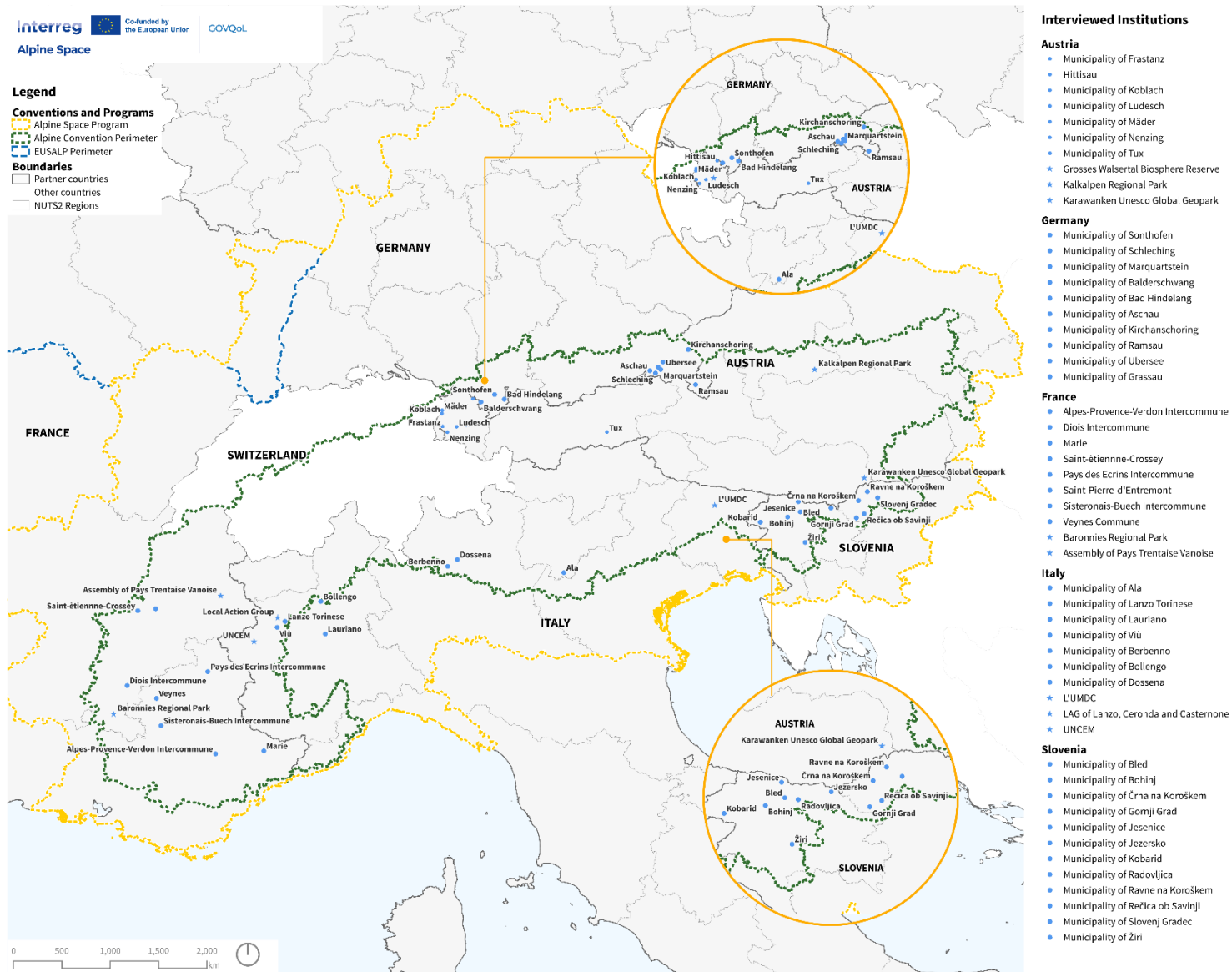


Figure 2 - Interview participants' institutions and their locations (source: authors' own elaboration)

3 Analysis and Local Needs

3.1 National overview

Among the five countries GOVQOL is focused on, Austria accounts for the largest share of the Alpine Convention area², covering 28.7% of the total territory and hosting approximately 23.3% of its population. Of Austria's nine federal states, eight fall within the Convention perimeter: Vorarlberg, Tyrol and Carinthia are entirely included, while Salzburg, Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Styria and Burgenland are partially concerned. Altogether, these states represent about 65% of Austria's national territory, corresponding to 54,819 km². In Italy, roughly 17% of the national surface area (52,104 km²) lies within the Alpine Convention territory. This includes seven of the country's twenty regions (Liguria, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia – NUTS 2), 23 provinces and the Metropolitan City of Turin, amounting to 107 NUTS 3 units and 1,654 municipalities out of a national total of 7,896. Overall, Italian Alpine territories account for 27.3% of the Convention's total area and about 30.6% of the population covered. In France, the Alpine region extends over approximately 40,047 km², representing 21.4% of the Alpine Convention territory and hosting 18.8% of its population. Of the thirteen mainland French regions (NUTS 1, following the regional reform of January 2015), only two are partially included in the Convention perimeter: Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. At the NUTS 3 level, nine out of 101 départements are concerned, with Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, Hautes-Alpes, Savoie and Haute-Savoie entirely included within the Convention area. In Germany, only about 3% of the national territory (11,157 km²) falls within the Alpine Convention, mainly located in Bavaria, the country's most significant Land in Alpine terms. As a result, Germany has the smallest share of national territory covered by the Convention among the Alpine countries, after Italy and France. Slovenia, although smaller than its Alpine neighbours, has approximately 40% of its national territory within the Convention area.

What is common to all the territories, and relates to quality of life, are the scattered settlement patterns, and the big gap between the large, metropolitan cities around the Alps, and the inner core where predominantly rural, and smaller towns can be found. This indirectly influences as well the quality of life, both in access to good living conditions, and in capacities of administration which is normally small in size.

Based on the provided answers, we can prepare an overview of common challenges related to the quality of life in general, and governance of quality of life more specifically. The summarisation for both contents is prepared in the Table 2 and Table 3. As the Table 2 shows, some of the challenges are standing out, like demographic change, climate change, accessibility to the basic services, mobility, and social cohesion with loss of local identity. Some of the challenges were mentioned only in particular countries, such as tourism impacts and changing lifestyles in Germany, low volunteer engagement in Austria and Germany, and economic diversity and sustainability in Austria

² data has been taken from the Alpine Convention Administrative Units list accessible from [Administrative Units AC.pdf](#)

and Slovenia. This does not mean that the challenges with less occurrences are not present in these countries, it just means that they were not brought forward or emphasised in the interviews.

Table 2: Overview of challenges concerning quality of life as reported in the interviews – national overview

Identified challenge	Austria	France	Germany	Italy	Slovenia
Demographic change	X	X	X	X	X
Accessibility to basic services	X	X		X	X
Climate change	X	X	X		X
Mobility	X	X		X	X
Social cohesion and loss of local identity	X		X	X	X
Housing affordability and availability	X		X		X
Health care access		X		X	X
Employment and lack of jobs		X	X		X
Education		X		X	X
Land scarcity and development pressure	X				X
Balancing development with nature protection	X		X		
Economic diversity and sustainability	X				X
Low volunteers' engagement	X		X		
Tourism impact			X		
Changing lifestyles			X		

Table 3 provides an overview of the identified challenges concerning the governance of quality of life as reported in the interviews. As derived from the interviews, the biggest challenges are the limited funds and financial capacity of municipalities, accompanied by a lack of human resources and their limited competences. This is especially apparent in the context of smaller Alpine municipalities, where the scale of administration is insufficient to meet the challenges. Along with these two challenges, strong dependence on EU funds and a lack of long-term or strategic planning were also mentioned in three out of five countries. The rest of the challenges were more specifically evident in one or two countries, e.g., a lack of monitoring, though it can be argued that this is also valid in other countries.

Table 3: Challenges concerning governance of quality of life as reported in the interviews – national overview

Identified challenge	Austria	France	Germany	Italy	Slovenia
Lack of human resources and their limited competences	X	X	X	X	X
Limited funds and financial capacity	X	X	X		X
No long term nor strategic planning	X	X		X	
Strong dependence on EU funds and programmes	X		X		X
Complexity of processes and lengthy bureaucratic procedures	X		X		
Legal constraints, e.g. Natura 2000	X		X		

Fragmented governance and shared responsibilities with intermunicipal and regional level	X			X	
Lack of interest among local people for participation					X
Limitations in services provision		X			
Lack of monitoring				X	

Looking at governance challenges, one needs to mention that differences in the type of municipalities, e.g. their urban status, were mentioned as conditioning the extent of challenges, as was the size of municipalities, with smaller municipalities being in the worst position and struggling more due to their smaller administration size. It was also mentioned that in some cases, regulatory standards unintentionally hinder small-scale amenities.

For more insight view, country profiles have been prepared, summarising the main findings from the interviews on the national level.

Austria

Description

Austria's Alpine topography leads to a pronounced axial pattern of development along valley floors and severely limits the availability of usable land. In the eastern federal states of Burgenland, Lower Austria and Upper Austria, well over 50% of the territory is considered usable land. By contrast, in strongly Alpine regions such as Tyrol, only 12.4% of the land is suitable for use. The western and south-western federal states—Salzburg, Styria, Carinthia, Tyrol and Vorarlberg—generally display a lower share of potential settlement areas. As a result, settlement pressure is concentrated in relatively small areas of usable land, which are characterised by a high degree of land sealing (Gruber et al., 2018). According to the Alpine Convention, Austria is the largest contracting state in terms of surface area, accounting for 28.7% of the total area of the Alpine region. Furthermore, of the approximately 14.2 million inhabitants living within the Alpine Convention territory, Austria hosts the second-largest share, with 23.3% of the total population, after Italy. Of the nine federal states that make up the Austrian federal republic, eight fall within the Alpine Convention perimeter. These are Vorarlberg, Tyrol and Carinthia, which are entirely included, as well as Salzburg, Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Styria and Burgenland, which are partially covered.

Across the Austrian case studies, QoL is strongly rooted in local living conditions, combining high environmental quality, reliable public services, and strong community cohesion. Most territories are rural or alpine municipalities and regions, characterized by close proximity to nature, small-scale settlement structures, and strong local identities. QoL is commonly understood as having essential services nearby (education, childcare, healthcare, mobility), affordable and adequate housing, and opportunities for social interaction, volunteering, and outdoor activities. Sustainability, climate neutrality, and landscape protection increasingly shape local development visions, while tourism, agriculture, and small businesses remain important economic pillars.

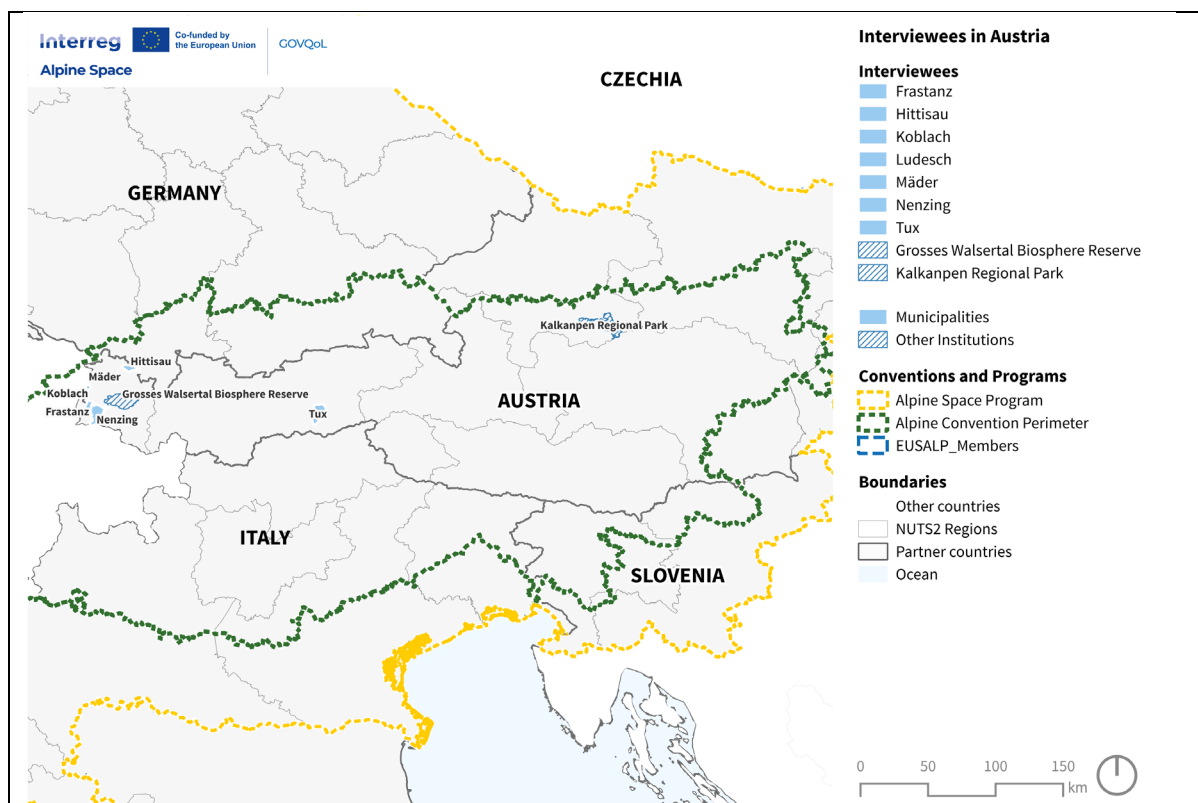
Across all cases, access to nature and environmental quality, strong social networks, and functional everyday infrastructure (mobility, education, health and care services) are identified as the strongest determinants of QoL. Equally important are community participation, active associations, and a sense of local belonging. Where economic stability (through tourism, agriculture, or local employment) aligns with sustainability goals and inclusive governance, QoL is perceived as particularly high and resilient.

Alpine challenges

Austrian Alps face number of prominent challenges including demographic change (ageing populations and youth outmigration), housing affordability, and balancing development with environmental protection. Peripheral alpine regions struggle with accessibility, mobility, and economic diversification, while more central municipalities face land scarcity and development pressure. Climate change is an increasingly shared concern, affecting forests, water systems, agriculture, tourism, and natural hazard risks. Maintaining volunteer engagement and social cohesion under changing lifestyles is another cross-cutting issue.

And in the administrative dimension, the municipalities struggle with the problems related to finance. A recurring institutional barrier is limited municipal financial capacity, combined with strong dependence on regional, national, or EU funding programs (e.g. LEADER, e5, KEM/KLAR!). Moreover, complexity of the processes, legal constraints (especially in spatial planning, Natura 2000 protection, and referenda outcomes), and fragmented governance between municipal, regional, and provincial levels often slow down the implementation. Smaller municipalities also face capacity limits in terms of staff, long-term strategic planning, and systematic monitoring of QoL outcomes.

	Alpine Convention Territory	Total	Percent
Inhabitants (in Alpine region)	≈ 3,404,000	≈ 14,800,0000	23.5%
Total Surface (of Alpine region) (km ²)	54,543 km ²	190,711 km ²	28.6%



France

Description

The Alps are located in the south-eastern part of France, where they form a natural border with several neighbouring countries, and are traditionally divided into the Northern and Southern Alps. In the south, France borders Italy, with the Alps extending along much of the Franco-Italian frontier. In this area, the mountains gradually descend towards the Mediterranean Sea and also define the border with the Principality of Monaco. In the north, the Alps form the natural boundary between France and Switzerland.

According to the Alpine Convention, the total area of the Alpine region is 190,700 km². Of this area, 40,047 km² (21.4%) lie within French territory, encompassing 42 major mountain massifs. France therefore represents the third-largest Alpine country by surface area, after Austria (53,396 km²) and Italy (51,941 km²). Furthermore, of the approximately 14.2 million inhabitants living within the Alpine Convention territory, 18.8% reside in France.

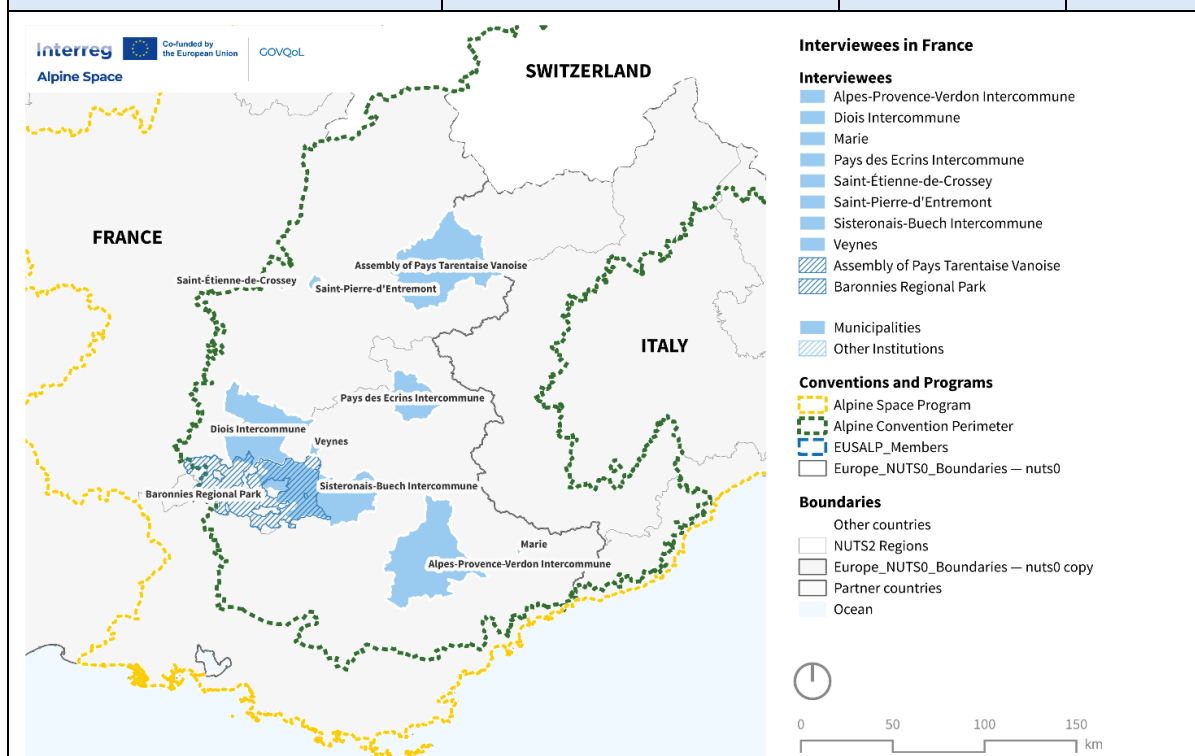
The French Alps are characterised by strong regional contrasts, stretching from the Swiss border in the north and the Italian border in the east down toward the Mediterranean. This vast mountain range combines areas of strong economic dynamism with territories that retain a deeply rural character. These differences shape living conditions, economic opportunities, and access to services across the region. In the northern French Alps, territories are generally more prosperous and densely populated. This area hosts some of Europe's largest and most renowned ski resorts, supported by a powerful tourism economy and relatively well-developed transport infrastructure linking resorts to major urban and economic centres. However, even in the north, mobility remains uneven, as transport networks often prioritise access to ski areas rather than connections between valleys or small villages. In contrast, the southern French Alps are less

populated and economically less developed. These territories are marked by preserved natural landscapes, quieter lifestyles, and a strong proximity to nature, offering a high QoL in environmental and scenic terms. At the same time, they face major challenges, including remoteness from large cities, limited transport networks, fewer job opportunities, and shortages in housing and essential social services such as schools, nurseries, and healthcare facilities.

Alpine challenges

Rural mountain areas in France face structural difficulties related to accessibility, demographic decline, and economic sustainability. Institutional barriers play a key role: small municipalities have limited competences, with many responsibilities—particularly transport—managed at inter-municipal or regional levels. Combined with insufficient municipal revenues, especially outside tourist areas, this limits local authorities' ability to develop tailored services. As a result, QoL is most immediately affected by mobility constraints, while education, employment, healthcare access, and the growing impacts of climate change will shape the long-term resilience and attractiveness of these mountain territories.

	Alpine Convention Territory	Total	Percent
Inhabitants (in Alpine region)	≈ 2,900,800	≈ 14,800,0000	19.6%
Total Surface (of Alpine region)	40,812 km ²	190,711 km ²	21.4%



Germany

Description

The German section of the Alps is primarily located in Bavaria, which forms an integral part of the Alpine region. Although the Bavarian Alps constitute only a small portion of the overall Alpine range, they play a significant role in shaping the landscape of southern Germany and strongly

influence the region's climate, biodiversity and economic activities. They contribute substantially to the country's geographical and environmental diversity, offering distinctive landscapes and valuable natural habitats. Moreover, the Bavarian Alps represent an important asset for tourism and agriculture. The conservation of the mountain environment, the sustainable management of natural resources and the promotion of responsible tourism are among the key challenges that call for cross-border cooperation and shared commitment. Germany's involvement in the Alpine region, while limited in terms of surface area compared to other Alpine countries, nonetheless plays an important role in cross-border governance and environmental protection within this distinctive landscape. Under the framework of the Alpine Convention—which aims to safeguard Alpine ecosystems and promote sustainable development—approximately 3% of Germany's national territory, corresponding to about 11,157 km² out of a total area of 357,569 km², is included. As a result, Germany is among the countries with the smallest proportion of national territory falling within the Alpine Convention perimeter, following Italy and France.

Across the German case studies, QoL is closely linked to living in and with intact cultural and natural landscapes, particularly in rural and alpine municipalities. Communities are characterized by strong village identities, high environmental quality, and a close connection between settlement, agriculture, tourism, and landscape management. QoL is commonly defined through short distances, reliable everyday services (education, healthcare, childcare, local supply), safety, and strong social cohesion sustained by clubs, associations, and volunteerism. Tourism plays a dual role: it supports local economies and infrastructure but also increases pressure on housing, mobility, and sensitive landscapes. Sustainability concepts such as Mountaineering Villages, health-climate resorts, biosphere and nature park frameworks shape local development models.

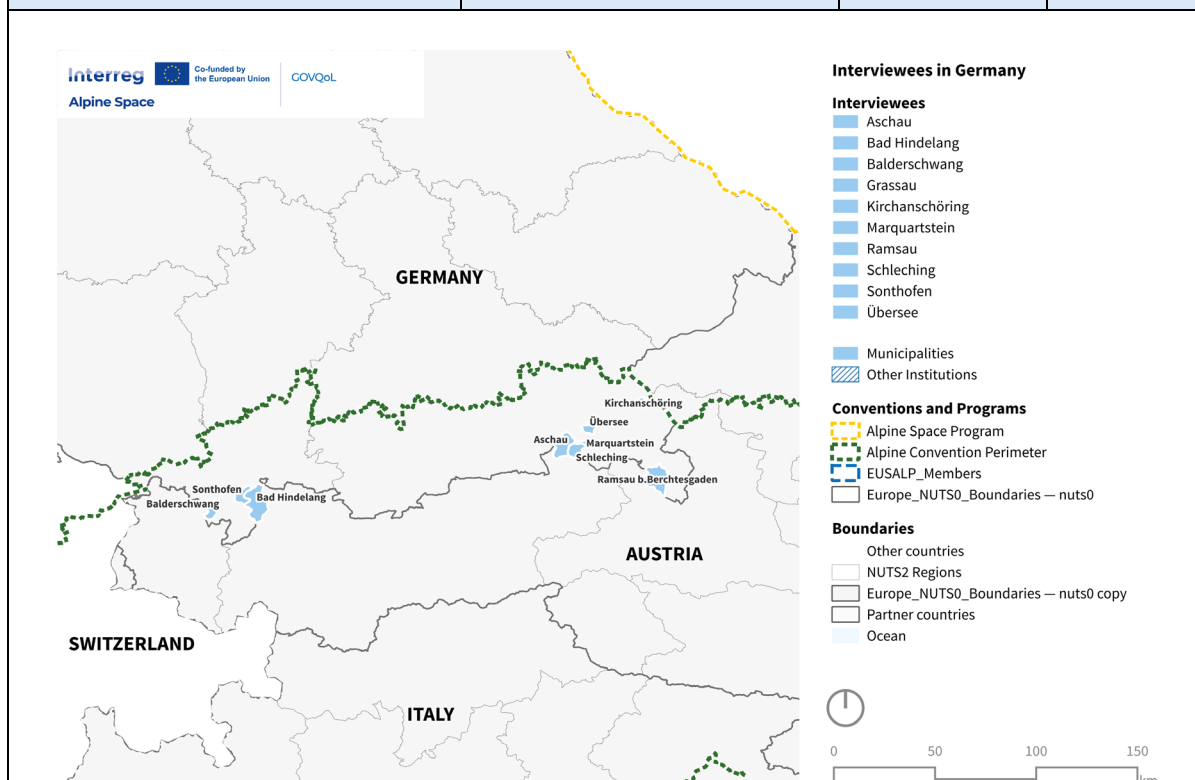
Across all German cases, environmental quality and landscape integrity, social cohesion, and access to everyday services within short distances are the strongest determinants of QoL. Active civic life, strong local associations, and opportunities for participation enhance resilience and belonging. Where sustainable tourism, housing policies for locals, climate-adaptive planning, and inclusive governance align, QoL is perceived as high despite structural constraints. Mobility solutions, climate resilience, and affordable housing are expected to become the most decisive future influences on QoL.

Alpine challenges

In Germany, the most challenges include housing affordability and availability, demographic ageing, and retaining younger generations. Tourism pressure leads to traffic congestion, environmental stress at hotspots, and competition for housing. Climate change increasingly affects forests, water systems, winter tourism reliability, and settlement comfort (heat, shading, water retention). Many municipalities also struggle to balance conservation requirements with development needs, while maintaining social services and volunteer engagement under changing lifestyles and labour shortages. Beyond that, the governance also struggles with institutional barriers that frequently arise from limited financial and administrative capacity at the municipal level, combined with high dependence on external funding programs (EU, federal and Bavarian schemes). Complex bureaucratic procedures, strict environmental regulations (e.g.

Natura 2000, national park buffer zones), and long approval processes constrain local flexibility, especially in housing and infrastructure development. Smaller municipalities report difficulties in staffing, long-term monitoring, and equal access to funding compared to larger cities. In some cases, regulatory standards unintentionally hinder small-scale, locally driven amenities.

	Alpine Territory	Convention	Total	Percent
Inhabitants (in Alpine region)	≈ 858,400		≈ 14,800,000	5.8%
Total Surface (of Alpine region)	20,978 km ²		190,711 km ²	11%



Italy

Description

The Italian Alps are commonly divided into three main sectors, further structured into groups and subgroups: the Western Alps, the Central Alps and the Eastern Alps. According to the Alpine Convention, the total area of the Alpine region is 190,700 km². Of this area, 51,941 km² (27.3%) fall within Italian territory, making Italy the second-largest Alpine country by surface area after Austria. In addition, of the approximately 14.2 million inhabitants living within the Alpine Convention territory, the largest share (30.6%) resides in Italy. Of Italy's 20 regions (NUTS 2), seven fall within the Alpine region: Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta and Veneto. Regarding the Alpine Convention, the designated perimeter spans 24 NUTS 3 units out of a national total of 107. Among these are the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, both of which are entirely included within the Convention area.

In addition, three ordinary provinces - Aosta, Sondrio and Belluno - are fully included within the Alpine Convention territory. At the municipal level, Italy comprises 7,896 municipalities, of which 1,654 fall within the Alpine Convention territory. Geospatial analysis indicates that approximately 17% of Italy's total surface area is covered by the Alpine Convention, corresponding to 52,104 km². This represents the third smallest national share among the countries considered, after Germany (3%) and France (6%).

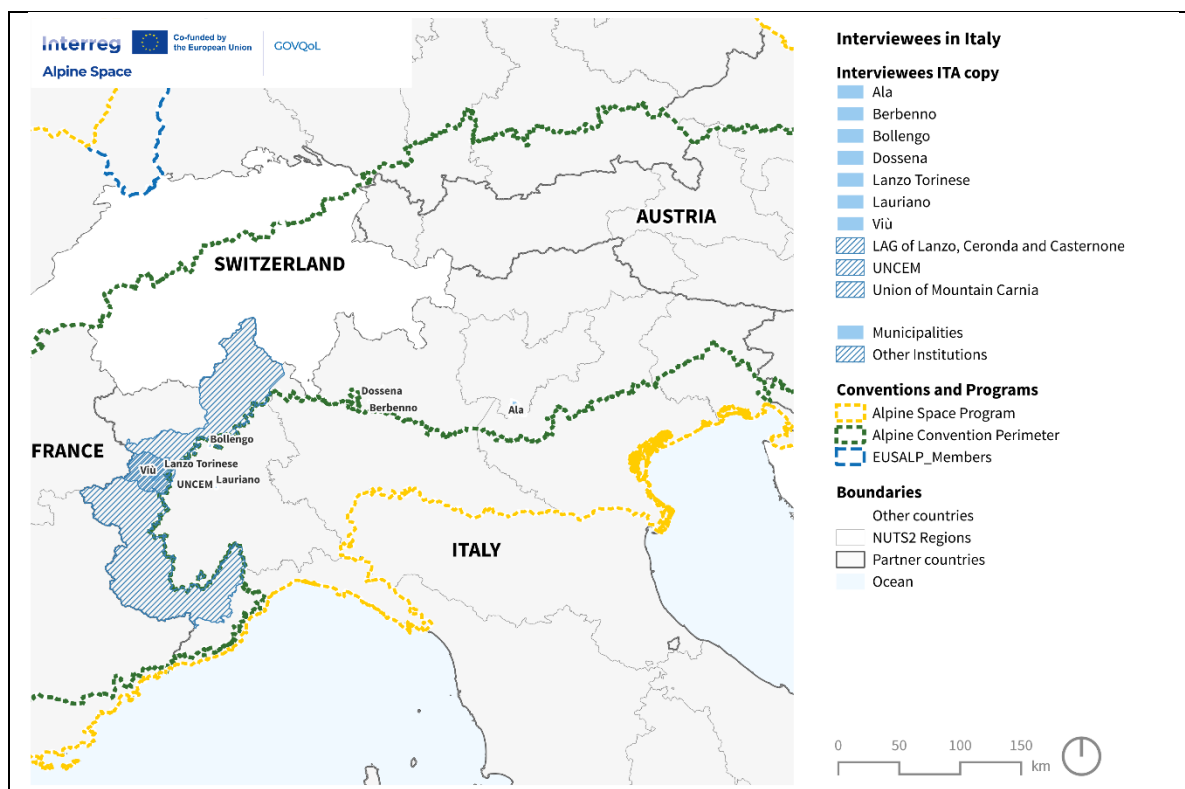
In the Italian context, QoL is mostly approached from the social and governmental perspectives. Social cohesion and justice in the community are the most important factors, along with participatory decision-making processes that take citizens' opinions into account. Therefore, in the Italian Alps, the human-scale way of life that supports social life and active public engagement is key to achieving a high QoL. And to do so, the local governances have been seen as the key actors to act, and provide the required services, not only in terms of physical services, but also social services.

Therefore, the most important factors that influences the QoL has been considered as the access to the fundamental services in Italy with highlight the mobility and the facilitation for the active community life. Not only the basic services such as education, healthcare, but also the quality of environment and the community spaces for social welfare is very important for the Italian Alpine communities. Beyond that, given the importance of social life, trust-building, participation, and solidarity are key to QoL in public engagement.

Alpine challenges

The most crucial challenges are deeply rooted within the governmental context of the Italian Alps. The absence of strategic and systemic planning due to short-term, fragmented and sectoral focuses in policymaking weakens the governmental dimension of QoL. Beyond that, top-down decision-making processes detached from the local scale add another layer to the main issue, causing bigger problems, particularly in service provision. Accessibility to the public services is a crucial problem in the Italian Alps, particularly with the lack of mobility services. The insufficient transportation networks, especially to the remote and rural areas, cause problems in terms of accessing other fundamental services, such as education and healthcare. Beyond that, the lack of communal services and access to them also causes several problems within the Alpine communities, with an increasing feeling of loneliness and mental health support issues, especially in the post-pandemic period. Also, the intergenerational differences within the communities raise concerns regarding the shrinking population and loss of local traditions.

	Alpine Convention Territory	Total	Percent
Inhabitants (in Alpine region)	≈ 4,292,000	≈ 14,800,0000	%29
Total Surface (of Alpine region)	51,491 km ²	190,711 km ²	%27.3



Slovenia

Description

Slovenia is classified as an Alpine country, as approximately 40% of its territory is classified as Alpine. Of this share, 11% consists of Alpine Mountain areas and 29% of pre-Alpine landscapes. At the same time, 100% of Slovenia's territory falls within both the Alpine Space Transnational Cooperation Programme area and the EUSALP Alpine Region. In Slovenia, the Alps are divided into three parts: the Julian Alps in the north-western part, the Karawanken in the north, and the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, south of the Karawanken. Besides the main Alpine ranges, the Alpine territory also includes the pre-Alpine hilly landscape and river valleys, such as the Soča River Valley, the Upper Sava River Valley, and the Drava River Valley, which are the largest, as well as other smaller valleys, such as the Meža, Sora, and Kokra. These valleys are also the most inhabited parts of the Slovene Alpine territory. Out of 12 statistical regions (NUTS 3), seven can be considered Alpine, lying at least partially within the Alpine Convention perimeter. These regions include Osrednjeslovenska, Goriška, Gorenjska, Koroška, Podravska, Savinjska, and Primorsko-notranjska. Among those, Koroška (the only region fully within the perimeter), Gorenjska, and Goriška (predominantly within the perimeter) are the most predominantly Alpine. Out of 212 municipalities in Slovenia, 45 are fully within the Alpine Convention perimeter, while another 17 are partially within the perimeter.

Across Alpine municipalities in Slovenia, QoL is generally understood as an overarching topic, largely connected to subjective perception and residential satisfaction, but also linked to a preserved natural environment and access to basic services. Among these, the most crucial

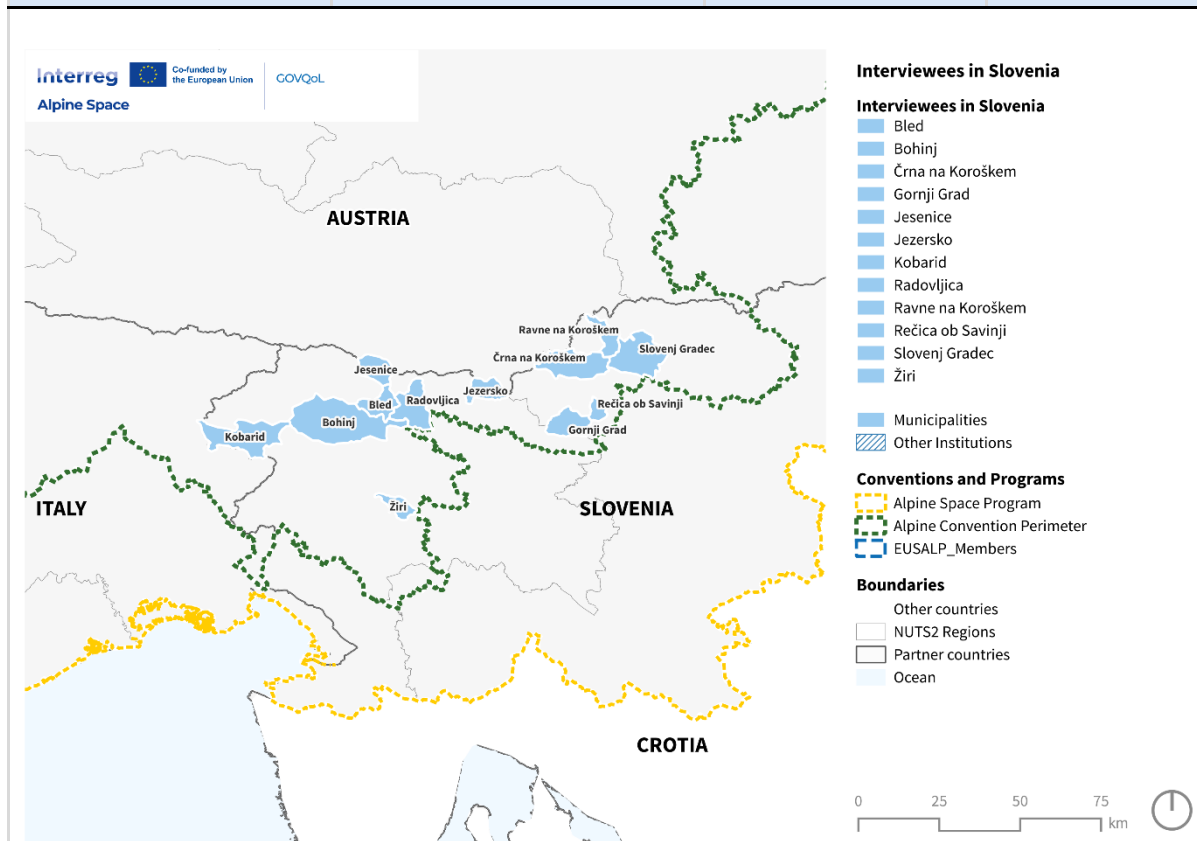
mentioned are water supply, sewage, transport connections and internet access, healthcare, and education. Other key aspects include a sense of safety and health, strong community ties, cultural vitality, and local identity. Another related topic is housing, especially the problem of unaffordable housing, which is often attributed to tourism and short-term rentals. A preserved environment and peaceful lifestyle are in some cases seen as compensating for remoteness and distance from major urban centres. The term QoL is usually not explicitly used by municipalities or in their strategic documents; however, it is mostly addressed through different sectors, such as spatial planning and environment, housing, infrastructure, tourism, and care for specific social groups (e.g., youth and the elderly). Ensuring QoL is also linked to balanced development and nature protection, with a strong contribution from local associations and volunteers (especially firefighters' associations, whose role was recognised as crucial) in almost every municipality.

The factors that influence QoL the most are demographic trends, accessibility, and the quality of infrastructure and service provision, as well as a preserved natural environment and lively social and cultural life. The availability of basic infrastructure (e.g., water supply, sewage, electricity, internet) and transport connections is considered crucial. Transport connections (public transport as well as proximity to major national railway networks or motorways) are important with regard to accessibility to services of general interest, healthcare, education, and job opportunities, and in some cases also for shopping opportunities and cultural life. Especially for young people, housing is one of the major issues, as the problem of inaccessible housing is a nationwide problem in Slovenia, however, the same issue also affects the elderly and others. Remote Alpine municipalities face outmigration and lack younger generations, predominantly due to the lack of services and infrastructure. Among the factors that most positively influence QoL are recreational opportunities in the local environment and strong community life. Tourism has become another key factor, both as an opportunity for the local economy and as a contributor to higher living costs, housing unavailability, and (seasonal) traffic.

Alpine challenges

Challenges that many Alpine communities face in Slovenia include major topics such as spatial challenges and housing, demographics, service provision and infrastructure, traffic, social relations, and governance. Among spatial challenges, the mountainous terrain and limited space availability are key, together with remoteness and distance from major urban centres. Another threat is posed by extreme weather events, potentially causing floods and landslides, which can damage infrastructure and housing. Housing issues are related to limited availability and affordability. Demographic challenges include youth outmigration and aging population. In the area of service provision and infrastructure, the main issues include limited availability of basic services (shops, post offices, banks, etc.), especially in remote and rural areas, and poorer quality roads in some rural areas. A widespread issue is also the lack of staff, especially in sectors like healthcare and education, but in other sectors as well. Traffic challenges are in some cases related to a lack of parking spaces, as well as heavy traffic due to tourism. Social relations include challenges such as weakening social ties in the community, and lack of respect and tolerance among different social groups. Challenges related to governance include a lack of interest among inhabitants (especially youth) in participating in decision-making processes, as well as difficulties related to the implementation of local policies.

	Alpine Convention Territory	Total	Percent
Inhabitants (in Alpine region)	≈ 2,812,000	≈ 14,800,000	19.6%
Total Surface (of Alpine region)	40049.31 km ²	190,711 km ²	21.4%



3.2 Local needs and territorial priorities emerging from interviews

Quality of life related factors, challenges and prospects

Across the 52 interviews, QoL is consistently described by local administrations as a multidimensional concept that depends on the interaction between material living conditions and the lived experience of belonging to a place. QoL is interpreted in diverse ways with notable national emphases. **In Italy, QoL is understood primarily in the context of social cohesion and governance (i.e., territorial equity), with particular emphasis on citizen-centred decision-making,** service quality, and the maintenance of essential services, especially in rural and mountainous areas. At the same time, they stress that QoL in mountain territories also depends on social capital, reciprocity, active associations, and a “human-scale” way of living that many interviewees see as a key asset of smaller Alpine communities. In several Italian cases, QoL is discussed not only as an outcome of municipal action but also as a question of territorial justice. Similarly, in **France, QoL is defined as the ability to live year-round in one’s territory with access to essential services such as employment, housing, and social and cultural activities, alongside well-preserved natural and landscape assets, while emphasising inclusiveness for the entire population.** In the French interviews, the idea of QoL is often inseparable from the question of whether mountain territories remain genuinely inhabitable for residents rather than merely attractive to visitors.

In Slovenia, QoL is primarily related to residents’ subjective perceptions of satisfaction, closely linked to access to services, safety, strong community ties, and the overall aim of improving living standards. For instance, in municipalities such as Bled, Radovljica, and Jezersko, subjective satisfaction and the attractiveness of the living environment are strongly emphasised, while in Jesenice, Kobarid, Bohinj, and Ravne na Koroškem, the discourse is more closely tied to infrastructure, housing, mobility, and the practical functioning of the municipality. Across the Slovenian interviews, however, one common feature is the effort to connect local QoL with broader national and European policy frameworks. **Meanwhile, in Germany and Austria, in addition to these dimensions, QoL is strongly associated with its spatial and environmental aspects, prioritising public (leisure?) spaces, social interaction, and cultural activities, as well as sustainable mobility practices, including walkable towns and car-free lifestyles.** German administrations often present QoL as something actively governed through planning, landscape protection, public space design, and careful regulation of settlement growth. In Austria, in these interviews, QoL is rarely reduced to income or infrastructure alone. Rather, it is associated with short distances, family-friendly settings, safety, volunteerism, access to mountains and open spaces, and the capacity of local institutions to preserve a balance between development and local identity. Taken together, the 52 interviews show that Alpine administrations do not treat QoL as a narrow technical indicator (Table 4). They understand it as a territorial and political condition shaped by the combined availability of services, environmental quality, social cohesion, local identity, and residents’ perception that their municipality remains a viable place in which to live, work, raise children, and age with dignity.

Table 4 - Understanding QoL (source: author's own elaboration)

Country	Administrations (representative examples)	Core Definition of QoL	Key Emphasis
Austria	Nenzing; Koblach; Mäder; Ludesch; Tux; Hittisau; Biosphärenpark Großes Walsertal	Balance between access to services, environmental quality, and strong community life	Social cohesion (Mäder, Koblach) + sustainability (Nenzing)
France	Diois; Sisteron-Buëch; Pays des Écrins; Saint- Pierre d'Entremont; APTV	Liveability in fragile mountain contexts combining access to services and solidarity	Territorial viability (Diois, Écrins) + access to services (Sisteron- Buëch)
Germany	Sonthofen; Bad Hindelang; Schleching; Grassau; Ramsau; Übersee	Liveability shaped by spatial planning, proximity, and environmental harmony	Planning and accessibility (Sonthofen, Grassau) + landscape balance (Ramsau)
Italy	UNCEM Piemonte; Lanzo; Viù; Carnia; Dossena; Bollengo	Access to essential rights and services in marginal areas	Territorial equity (UNCEM, Carnia) + community life (Lanzo, Viù)
Slovenia	Jesenice; Bled; Radovljica; Bohinj; Kobarid; Črna na Koroškem	Residents' well-being and satisfaction, combining infrastructure and environment	Satisfaction (Bled, Radovljica) + access to services (Jesenice)

Factors Contributing to quality of life

When the administrations explain what most strongly affects QoL, two broad categories recur across all countries (Table 5). The first category includes objective factors related to living conditions, such as healthcare, schools, childcare, housing, public transport, digital connectivity, public infrastructure, access to work, and environmental conditions. The second category includes subjective factors such as trust, social cohesion, belonging, local identity, perceived safety, satisfaction with public life, and the feeling that one's municipality is future-oriented. The interviews show that these two dimensions are deeply intertwined: poor infrastructure often undermines social cohesion, while strong community networks can partially compensate for structural deficits in the short term.

The provided answers can be summarised as follows. All countries consider QoL a topic strongly related to access to services and infrastructure, though with different foci. In Italy, access to fundamental services, particularly education, healthcare, and mobility, is strongly related to environmental quality and active community life, especially in rural areas. More in detail, UNCEM Piedmont, Unione di Montana della Carnia, and the LAG of Lanzo, Ceronda and Casternone insist that mobility, access to services, and institutional capacity are preconditions for any serious quality-

of-life policy in mountain areas. Lanzo, Viù, Ala, Lauriano, Dossena, Berbenno, and Bollengo all point to the centrality of schools, social services, transport, community spaces, and local welfare. Yet they also insist that these factors cannot be separated from trust, participation, and local solidarity. In the Italian cases, subjective well-being is often discussed through the lens of whether people feel that their municipality still has “power to act” and whether mountain residents are recognised rather than administratively marginalised.

In addition to these aspects, the Slovenian case study also identifies communal infrastructure, such as water supply, sewage systems, waste collection, and internet access, as factors affecting QoL. Alongside these material conditions, cultural life, safety, recreation, and strong community and networks play a significant role, with the natural environment and landscape being especially important in more mountainous areas. At that point, French's case studies also highlighted environmental protection and climate change adaptation as the main factors affecting QoL, particularly regarding food security and water scarcity. In more detail, the Austrian interviews present a balanced picture of the relationship between structural conditions and social cohesion. Nenzing stresses the importance of nearby services and social connections, as well as the challenge of declining volunteer engagement. Koblach and Mäder associate QoL with accessibility, affordable housing, climate action, and strong local participation. Ludesch and Frastanz highlight family-friendly services and local amenities, while Tux, Hittisau, and Biosphärenpark Großes Walsertal emphasise the value of maintaining harmony among economy, landscape, and community. In Austrian cases, environmental quality is rarely treated as a standalone factor; it is almost always linked to settlement patterns, social life, and local identity. In the French interviews, objective living conditions are often more problematic. Communauté de communes du Diois, Sisteron-Buëch, Pays des Écrins, and Alpes Provence Verdon repeatedly cite healthcare, affordable housing, and access to services as decisive factors for territorial viability. Saint-Pierre d'Entremont / Savoie and Marie point to winter isolation and uneven access to everyday services, especially for older residents. Veynes and APTV also stress mobility and planning. At the same time, the French administrations underline that mountain QoL depends on the emotional and symbolic value of living in a healthy and socially cohesive environment. The risk they identify is not only service decline, but also the erosion of the social fabric that makes rural mountain living sustainable. The German interviews are particularly strong on the spatial and design dimensions of QoL. Sonthofen emphasises a people-centred urban environment; Bad Hindelang, Aschau, and Ramsau connect QoL with environmental harmony; Schleching, Grassau, and Übersee value the possibility of meeting everyday needs locally; and Marquartstein, Kirchanschöring, and Balderschwang draw attention to the need to preserve rural identity while facing demographic, tourism, or development pressures. German administrations frequently treat QoL as something that can be damaged by uncontrolled growth, traffic, second-home pressure, or settlement fragmentation.

The Slovenian interviews again combine infrastructural and experiential dimensions. Jesenice, Kobarid, Bohinj, and Ravne na Koroškem emphasise infrastructure, housing, and public services; Črna na Koroškem and Gornji Grad add digital connectivity and remoteness; Bled, Radovljica, and Jezersko stress resident satisfaction and environmental attractiveness; while Žiri, Slovenj Gradec,

and Rečica ob Savinji highlight cultural life, public space, and strong municipal services. A recurring feature in Slovenia is that the local administration views QoL not only as an internal municipal matter but also as a condition shaped by the municipality's ability to translate broader frameworks into local improvements.

Table 5: Key Factors Affecting QoL (source: authors' own elaboration)

Administrations	Objective factors most frequently highlighted	Subjective factors most frequently highlighted
Austria: Nenzing; Koblach; Mäder; Ludesch; Tux; Südkärnten-Karawanken; Frastanz; LEADER Region Nationalpark Kalkalpen; Hittisau; Biosphärenpark Großes Walsertal	Environmental quality and access to nature Proximity and provision of services, e.g. childcare, schools Housing Mobility Renewable energy Local economic opportunities Spatial planning capacity	Community spirit Volunteer culture and intergenerational solidarity Balance between tradition and innovation Local identity and pride; Perceived safety Attachment to landscape
France: Communauté de communes du Diois; Saint-Pierre d'Entremont / Savoie; Communauté de communes Sisteron-Buëch; PNR Baronnies provençales; Communauté de communes Pays des Écrins; Communauté de communes Alpes Provence Verdon; Saint-Étienne de Crossey; Marie; Veynes; APTV	Preservation of biodiversity and natural resources; proximity and provision of services, e.g. healthcare, education, childcare Affordable housing Mobility Essential commerce Employment Spatial planning	Social ties Perceived isolation or inclusion Peacefulness Solidarity Well-being linked to mountain life Sense of local resilience and local identity
Germany: Sonthofen; Bad Hindelang; Schleching; Marquartstein; Aschau; Balderschwang; Grassau; Kirchanschöring; Ramsau; Übersee	Environmental protection Landscape management Infrastructure and local services Housing Transport Accessibility within the municipality Local jobs Walkability Settlement control	Social cohesion Liveability Harmony between residents and environment Local identity and belonging

Italy: UNCEN Piedmont; Lanzo; Viù; Ala; Lauriano; Dossena; Berbenno; Bollengo; Unione di Montana della Carnia; LAG of Lanzo, Ceronda and Casternone	Proximity and provision of services, e.g. healthcare, schools, childcare, elderly care Transport Digital access Local commerce, infrastructure renewal, capacity to attract funding	Social inclusion Community belonging Collective responsibility Perceived abandonment or recognition Civic engagement
Slovenia: Črna na Koroškem; Jezersko; Jesenice; Bled; Žiri; Slovenj Gradec; Radovljica; Kobarid; Bohinj; Ravne na Koroškem; Rečica ob Savinji; Gornji Grad	Proximity and provision of services, e.g. healthcare, schools Housing Public transport and roads Internet Water and sewage system, Disaster prevention, administrative capacity	Social vitality Residential satisfaction Feeling good and well-being Local identity, Aesthetic quality of place Safety

Relevant policies, actions and interventions

The interviews show that few administrations work with a single, self-standing “QoL policy.” Instead, **QoL is usually governed through a layered combination of municipal plans, sectoral strategies, regional frameworks, and project-based instruments.** Across the 52 interviews, one point is clear: QoL must be governed horizontally through cooperation among multiple sectors. It emerges from how administrations intertwine the policy fields of land use, welfare, energy provision, mobility, housing, environmental protection, and participation. The strongest cases are not necessarily those local communities with a dedicated quality-of-life policy, but those in which local administrations can align multiple sectoral tools around a coherent territorial vision (Table 6).

QoL has been addressed **through policy documents within multilevel governance structures**, though with varying degrees of explicitness, coordination, and territorial sensitivity. While in Germany and Austria QoL has been discussed within a multilevel governance structure, in the case of Italy, there are some differences across the various regions despite some examples at the national level (Italy). In both cases, QoL functions as an overarching yet largely implicit goal. In Italy, due to its regionalist approach, QoL is implemented differently across the ordinary regions and those with special status (Valle d’Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige e Friuli-Venezia Giulia). Importantly, at the national level in Italy, the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) serves as the main blueprint for improving QoL in remote rural areas by promoting a more balanced development of basic services. In France and Slovenia, the local level is the main body responsible for covering QoL. Therefore, even if municipal-level activities are generally perceived by the interviewees as satisfactory for QoL, the need for mountain-specific policies remains high.

In Slovenia, rather than being explicitly defined in municipal strategic documents, QoL is mostly addressed indirectly through sectoral policies. Except for Jesenice, which identifies QoL as a strategic objective, other municipalities embed QoL within development strategies for tourism, culture, mobility, the environment, housing, and social services. At the national and regional levels, QoL has become an important objective and has been integrated into broader frameworks, including the Slovenian Development Strategy 2030, EU Cohesion Policy, and other national and regional legislation and policy instruments. Alongside long-standing cultural traditions embedded in spatial practices, such as living space concepts, local mobility plans, and centre-oriented master plans, EU-funded and regional projects play a pivotal role in steering QoL. In France, QoL is primarily addressed at the local level, with the Local Urban Development Plan (PLU) and the Territorial Coherence Plan (SCOT) serving as the main policy documents. Through participatory and human-centred approaches, these regulatory planning instruments aim to define long-term development guidelines that balance housing, industry, mobility, access to services, and environmental protection. In addition, housing cooperatives, energy efficiency policies, and sustainable mobility plans further support QoL at the local level. At the state level, however, decentralisation reforms have sparked renewed discussions on QoL. While decentralisation enables local authorities to be more responsive, fiscal imbalances and reduced resources for rural areas can limit access to essential services. This raises the ongoing question of how to balance economic development, access to public services, and the preservation of regional characteristics.

At a more granular level, if we examine the key tools mentioned in the interviews, we can identify common themes. In Austria, municipalities rely on dedicated climate and energy programmes, such as the e5 Programme (Koblach and Mäder) and the KLAR! Programme (Koblach), to promote climate adaptation, renewable energy, and sustainable spatial development. In France, integrated territorial planning is supported through planning instruments such as the SCOT/PLU (Communauté de communes du Diois), complemented by initiatives like the PACTE energy renovation programme (Saint-Pierre d'Entremont) to improve housing and energy efficiency. In Germany, strategic local planning and sustainability are promoted through initiatives such as the Lebensraumkonzept Bad Hindelang 2019–2030 (Bad Hindelang) and the Alpine Town of the Year network (Sonthofen), which support climate resilience, sustainable tourism, and nature conservation. In Italy, community resilience is fostered through innovative governance instruments, including Renewable Energy Communities (Lanzo) and the National Strategy for Inner Areas – SNAI, as well as multifunctional community hubs promoted by UNCEM Piemonte. Finally, in Slovenia, municipalities combine local governance tools such as the Youth Strategy (Črna na Koroškem) and the Mountaineering Villages Initiative (Jezersko) to strengthen youth engagement, sustainable tourism, environmental conservation, and community participation.

Table 6: Relevant policies, actions, interventions (source: authors' own elaboration)

Country	Key Instruments (examples)	Thematic Focus
Austria	e5 programmes (Koblach, Mäder); KLAR! Programme and RESI – Rhine Ecological Restoration Initiative (Koblach); Solar Community Programme and Climate neutrality strategy (Koblach and Frastanz); familieplus (Frastanz); KEM – Climate and Energy Model	Climate and energy transition; sustainable spatial planning; biodiversity conservation

	Region and KAM – Climate Adaptation Model Region (Südkärnten–Karawanken)	
France	Spatial planning document SCOT/PLU (Écrins, Diois, Communauté de communes du Diois); PACTE energy renovation programme (Saint-Pierre d'Entremont); Sustainable tourism strategy (Saint-Pierre d'Entremont)	Sustainable territorial planning; housing and energy renovation; biodiversity protection; social services; tourism
Germany	Alpine Town of the Year network (Sonthofen); Lebensraumkonzept Bad Hindelang 2019–2030 (Bad Hindelang); Local plans (Sonthofen, Grassau); Sustainable tourism planning (Bad Hindelang); environmental regulation (Ramsau)	Climate-resilient development; sustainable tourism; nature conservation
Italy	Renewable Energy Communities – CER and Integrated social services (Lanzo); Multifunctional community hubs (UNCCEM Piedmont); National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)	Community welfare; renewable energy communities; social innovation
Slovenia	Youth Strategy (Črna na Koroškem) Participatory budgeting (Črna na Koroškem) UNESCO Global Geopark (Črna na Koroškem) Mountaineering Villages Initiative – candidacy (Črna na Koroškem) Mountaineering Villages Initiative (Jezersko)	Rural development; sustainable tourism; youth and housing; community participation; environmental conservation

Obstacles to Policy Definition and Implementation

What emerges from all five countries is that obstacles are rarely purely technical. Financial limits, fragmented competencies, administrative overload, and weak long-term continuity all matter, but so do subtler issues such as declining volunteerism, civic fatigue, resistance to change, or the perception that local needs are not fully recognised by higher levels of government. For Alpine administrations, the challenge is therefore not only to design effective policies but also to sustain institutional and social capacity over time (Table 7). The interviews reveal a remarkably consistent set of obstacles across countries, even if they are expressed with different intensity. The most common difficulty is the mismatch between the broad responsibilities expected from local administrations and the limited financial, human, and technical resources actually available to them. This is stated very clearly in the French and Italian interviews, but it is present in the Austrian, German, and Slovenian material as well. In Austria, administrations such as Nenzing, Mäder, Ludesch, and Frastanz report difficulty reconciling multiple demands at once: climate goals, settlement pressures, demographic change, social inclusion, and limited administrative capacity. Koblach and Mäder can rely on structured frameworks such as e5, but even there, the challenge is

not only defining goals but maintaining continuity and implementation over time. In Tux, Hittisau, and Biosphärenpark Großes Walsertal, the tension between preservation and development is a recurring issue, especially where tourism, mobility, or land use compete with ecological protection and local needs. In France, structural fragility is described more starkly. Diois, Sisteron-Buëch, Pays des Écrins, Alpes Provence Verdon, and Saint-Pierre d'Entremont / Savoie repeatedly point to service decline, housing scarcity, climate pressure, and institutional fragmentation. Some interviews stress that public policies are often designed with urban assumptions and do not fit mountain realities well. Others underline fiscal imbalances and the difficulty of securing long-term investment in rural areas. The French administrations often suggest that the problem is not the absence of ideas, but the difficulty of transforming strategic intentions into durable action when governance is complex and demographic pressures are strong.

The German interviews focus more on the pressures associated with growth, tourism, and settlement management. Sonthofen, Grassau, Übersee, and Marquartstein indicate that maintaining QoL becomes difficult when traffic, housing pressure, land consumption, or visitor numbers exceed the municipality's carrying capacity. Bad Hindelang, Aschau, and Ramsau emphasise the challenge of preserving landscape quality while remaining economically viable. Here, the obstacle is often not weak in planning, but the constant need to balance competing functions of mountain territory. The Italian interviews are especially critical of administrative fragmentation and policy discontinuity. UNCEM Piedmont explicitly argues that excessive municipal fragmentation creates inefficiency, weakens strategic capacity, and may even undermine democratic legitimacy when very small administrations lack the scale needed to govern effectively. Lanzo, Viù, Ala, Dossena, Berbenno, and Bollengo also mention funding shortages, dependence on temporary projects, shifting political priorities, and difficulties ensuring continuity when local leadership changes. In Carnia and in the LAG of Lanzo, Ceronda and Casternone, mobility and accessibility are described as structural barriers that make it harder to implement other policy fields. In Slovenia, obstacles are often framed in terms of housing, transport, spatial constraints, and the limits of local capacity. Črna na Koroškem and Gornji Grad highlight remoteness and connectivity challenges; Jesenice underscores housing and traffic issues; Jezersko notes conflicts between conservation and development; Bohinj must reconcile resident needs with tourism pressure; and Ravne na Koroškem underscores dependence on external funding. Even where policy frameworks are relatively developed, implementation remains difficult when municipalities face demographic pressures, natural hazards, or limited room for expansion.

Table 7: Obstacles to Policy Definition and Implementation (source: authors' own elaboration)

Country	Structural Obstacles (examples)	Governance Obstacles (examples)	Social Obstacles (examples)
Austria	Land pressure (Nenzing); limited resources (Ludesch)	Coordination complexity (Mäder)	Declining volunteering (Koblach)
France	Service decline (Diois); housing shortage (Écrins)	Multi-level governance (APTV)	Isolation (Saint-Pierre d'Entremont)

Germany	Tourism pressure (Ramsau); land use conflicts (Sonthofen)	Policy trade-offs (Grassau)	Resistance to change (Schleching)
Italy	Infrastructure gaps (Carnia); funding instability (Lanzo)	Administrative fragmentation (UNCCEM)	Depopulation (Viù, Dossena)
Slovenia	Housing (Bohinj); remoteness (Črna na Koroškem)	Administrative limits (Jesenice)	Uneven participation (Radovljica)

Initiatives, Measures, Stakeholders, and Civil Society Involvement

The interviews show that local administrations do not passively describe QoL; they actively try to shape it through a wide range of initiatives. These measures often combine service provision, public space improvement, support for vulnerable groups, environmental action, and efforts to maintain active civic life (Table 8). Just as importantly, the interviews show that municipalities rarely act alone. QoL governance is co-produced by administrations, associations, schools and youth-related organisations, volunteer groups, social services, businesses, churches, firefighters, cultural actors, sports clubs, inter-municipal bodies, and regional development organisations. In Austria, this collaborative model is particularly visible. Nenzing refers to welcome breakfasts, neighbourhood events, youth and cultural activities, and programmes involving caregivers and migrant workers. Koblach combines climate action, renewable energy, and biodiversity projects with digital participation and volunteer networks. Mäder links childcare, mobility, energy transition, and ecological protection with digital tools and open-data approaches³. Ludesch, Frastanz, and Hittisau emphasise family support, public amenities, and strong local clubs. In Südkärnten–Karawanken, Nationalpark Kalkalpen, and Großes Walsertal, regional cooperation structures and protected-area initiatives also play an important role. Across the Austrian cases, associations, sports clubs, music groups, fire brigades, and volunteer networks are not peripheral actors; they are central pillars of local QoL. The French interviews reveal similarly rich ecosystems of local action, although often under more fragile conditions. Diois, Saint-Pierre d’Entremont / Savoie, Sisteron-Buëch, and Pays des Écrins discuss childcare, youth programmes, mobility support, settlement guidance, cultural services, and assistance for the elderly. In Saint-Pierre d’Entremont / Savoie, even seemingly small initiatives, such as grocery delivery for older residents, take on great meaning because they preserve dignity and everyday autonomy in isolated settings. PNR Baronnies provençales, Alpes Provence Verdon, Veynes, and APTV underline the importance of consultation, local management, sustainable planning, and service coordination. Here, civil society is often involved through consultations, local associations, volunteer projects, and territorial dialogue, but the interviews also suggest that participation depends heavily on the municipality’s capacity to animate and maintain these processes.

In Germany, initiatives tend to focus on local accessibility, settlement quality, environmental balance, and the social use of public space. Sonthofen highlights people-centred urban design; Schleching, Grassau, Kirchanschöring, and Übersee emphasise village-scale livability, walkability,

³ For instance, In Mäder, civic engagement is encouraged through digital tools like “Schau auf Mäder”

and local social infrastructure; while Bad Hindelang, Aschau, Balderschwang, and Ramsau connect quality-of-life measures to landscape stewardship, local agriculture, and tourism management. German administrations often portray associations, citizen groups, and local networks as key actors in sustaining community cohesion and helping municipalities implement practical improvements without losing sight of ecological limits. The Italian interviews show particularly diverse forms of local initiatives. Lanzo mentions social and cultural services, youth councils, community events, work integration projects, and energy initiatives. Viù refers to school investment, community nurses, medical transport, electric shuttles, and the reuse of historic buildings as multifunctional community spaces. Ala, Lauriano, Dossena, Berbenno, and Bollengo describe family support, welfare measures, social inclusion projects, public-space improvements, and collaboration with associations. UNCEM Piedmont, Carnia, and the LAG of Lanzo, Ceronda and Casternone expand the scale of the discussion by insisting on stronger commons-based governance, public-private reciprocity, and coordinated territorial action. In the Italian interviews, civil society is presented as essential not only for participation, but for the very survival of mountain services and community life. In Slovenia, municipalities often combine strong formal programming with practical measures. Črna na Koroškem highlights recreational infrastructure, support for volunteering, participatory budgeting, and investment in housing and elderly care. Jesenice and Žiri stress strategic documents linked to concrete projects in culture, sport, mobility, or social affairs. Bled, Radovljica, Slovenj Gradec, Kobarid, and Bohinj show how local administrations work with associations, emergency services, schools, and tourism or development actors to improve infrastructure, cultural life, and local well-being. Rečica ob Savinji and Gornji Grad place great value on associations and reliable municipal services, while Jezersko stresses the role of local clubs, rescue services, and direct contact between citizens and the municipality. Across the Slovenian interviews, stakeholder involvement takes formal and informal means, including participation of working groups, councils, surveys, associations, and direct communication all coexist. A cross-cutting result from the 52 interviews is that the most effective quality-of-life measures combine infrastructure and social infrastructure. Building a service is not enough if people do not trust it, use it, or feel included in it. Conversely, a strong community spirit can only go so far if the public provision of schools, healthcare, transport, or housing fails. The interviews, therefore, point to a governance model in which administrations, civil society, and territorial partners jointly produce the conditions of QoL.

The following table 8 attempts to categorise the “extent of involvement” using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum⁴. In more detail, the categories are:

- **Inform** – Provide balanced and objective information to help the public understand the issue, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions.
- **Consult** – Seek public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions.
- **Involve** – Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

⁴ [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation — Engagement Institute](#)

- **Collaborate** – Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions.
- **Empower** – Place final decision-making in the hands of the communities.

What emerged from this classification is that in no country are civil actors fully empowered. In Austria and Italy, stakeholders collaborate with municipalities as partners to some extent; in Germany and Slovenia, they are directly involved; and in France, they are consulted.

Table 8: Initiatives, Measures, Stakeholders, and Civil Society Involvement (source: author's own elaboration)

Country	Main Initiatives (examples)	Key Stakeholders (examples)	Participation Model
Austria	Climate and energy (Koblach, Mäder); community events (Nenzing)	Associations, volunteers, local groups (Hittisau)	Collaborate
France	Social services (Sisteron-Buëch); mobility (Diois); strategic planning (Écrins)	Inter-municipal bodies, NGOs (APT)	Consult
Germany	Public space (Sonthofen); environmental initiatives (Ramsau)	Citizen groups, local networks (Grassau)	Involve
Italy	Welfare and services (Lanzo, Viù); regeneration (Bollengo)	Municipalities, LAGs, unions (Carnia, UNCEM)	Collaborate
Slovenia	Infrastructure (Jesenice); cultural programmes (Bled)	NGOs, public services' providers (Kobarid, Žiri)	Involve

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring of QoL is one of the weakest dimensions across interviews. Although many administrations have a clear sense of what matters for QoL, far fewer have robust systems for measuring it regularly and systematically. In most cases, municipalities rely on a combination of project reporting, sectoral indicators, informal feedback, occasional surveys, and direct contact with residents (Table 9). This gives them a practical understanding of local conditions, but it often falls short of continuous and comparable monitoring. In Austria, a few administrations report more structured approaches. Koblach and Mäder use the e5 framework and related energy or sustainability processes, which provide recurring indicators and follow-up mechanisms. Nenzing, by contrast, explicitly notes the limitations of monitoring, citing only one citizen survey in recent years. Other Austrian administrations often rely more on everyday proximity to residents, association networks, and local feedback than on formal quality-of-life dashboards. This creates responsiveness, but it also limits long-term comparison. In France, monitoring is even less systematic in many cases. Sisteron-Buëch notes that no formal evaluation process exists yet for some strategic frameworks. Saint-Pierre d'Entremont / Savoie, Diois, and other French interviews suggest that QoL is assessed through direct observation, local consultation, and practical service

experience rather than through consolidated indicator systems. Some administrations conduct consultations during planning phases, but ongoing follow-up remains difficult due to capacity constraints and the complexity of inter-municipal governance.

The German cases indicate a somewhat stronger planning culture, but even there, the interviews do not point to highly standardised quality-of-life monitoring systems. Administrations such as Sonthofen, Grassau, or Übersee appear to work with planning and service data, but QoL, as such, is often inferred from spatial, environmental, or demographic trends rather than measured directly. In these interviews, QoL remains a strong policy objective, yet its evaluation is often indirect. The Italian material confirms this pattern. Several administrations clearly know what is affecting their territories, but systematic monitoring is limited and often dependent on funded projects, sector-specific reporting, or local political attention. Lanzo, Viù, Ala, Berbenno, and Bollengo describe many concrete initiatives, but the interview summaries rarely mention stable evaluation frameworks capable of assessing long-term change in an integrated way. UNCEM Piedmont is particularly clear that mountain policies should not be evaluated solely by quantitative outputs; they should also be assessed by whether they strengthen social capital, civic capacity, and communities' ability to remain inhabited and active. Among the Slovenian administrations, monitoring appears somewhat more developed in several cases. Jesenice refers to large-scale surveys roughly every five years together with sectoral assessments; Črna na Koroškem mentions regular surveys and participatory channels; Jezersko notes surveys linked to strategy preparation; and other municipalities combine direct communication with administrative and sectoral follow-up. Even so, fully integrated quality-of-life monitoring remains the exception rather than the rule. Across all five countries, the main finding is that Alpine administrations often have a strong qualitative understanding of local well-being but weaker quantitative and longitudinal tools to track it. This matters because the challenges identified in the interviews—housing pressure, demographic change, service fragility, climate risks, mobility gaps, and social transformation—are long-term processes. Without stronger monitoring, municipalities may remain highly adaptive in the short term but less able to demonstrate the cumulative effects of their policies or to compare outcomes across time and territories.

Table 9 presents a synthesis of the approaches identified regarding monitoring of QoL. In more details, several approaches have been observed:

- **Project-based monitoring** - QoL is monitored through specific projects and initiatives, but without a permanent monitoring framework.
- **Ad-hoc and consultation-based monitoring** - QoL information is mainly collected through participatory consultations and planning processes, rather than a continuous established system.
- **Indirect monitoring** - QoL is evaluated through planning, service, and development indicators rather than measured directly.

Besides these three observed models, we could also discuss systematic monitoring, in which QoL is assessed through regular surveys and strategic planning tools; however, this model is not applied in any of the municipalities.

Table 9 - Monitoring and Evaluation (source: author's own elaboration)

Country	Monitoring Approach	Tools (examples)	Main Gap
Austria	Project-based	e5 indicators (Koblach, Mäder); surveys (Nenzing)	Lack of systematic monitoring
France	Ad-hoc and consultation-based monitoring	Consultations (Diois); planning tools (Écrins)	No continuous evaluation
Germany	Indirect monitoring	Planning data (Sonthofen); service indicators (Grassau)	No explicit QoL metrics
Italy	Ad-hoc and consultation-based monitoring	Local feedback (Lanzo, Viù); project reports (Carnia)	No continuous evaluation
Slovenia	Ad-hoc and consultation-based monitoring	Surveys (Jesenice, Črna); strategies (Bled)	Limited integration into the policy making

3.3 Workshops

The discussion on quality of life is a welcome topic for the local level. It is a common subject; the general public also discusses it daily, so it was easy to motivate stakeholders to join the project-level discussions. Moreover, topics considered within the QoL domain are the main concerns and tasks of local communities and stakeholders, including public institutions and agencies across different sectors. The understanding of QoL is generally unified, and the stakeholders mostly raised the same or similar topics, with an emphasis on services and infrastructure; in some municipalities, environmental and social relations were also pointed out. The basic elaboration of the concept across Alpine countries showed that the emphasis and challenges, although at first sight similar, also have local connotations and specifics that need to be considered while addressing the raised problems. For example, access to services was mentioned multiple times as problematic; however, various solutions were also discussed that might not work in all local communities. It might be that either the solution was tested out already and did not work, or there is no knowledge to implement it, or there are simply too many obstacles, e.g. regulation or lack of finance, to implement it.

What worked well during the workshops was identifying the challenges local communities have in securing a good QoL. In this regard, they also specified what works well. **The most difficult part was to talk about governance and, specifically, governance of QoL**, as this was perceived as something abstract. This discussion, however, yielded also interesting results, revealing both,

horizontal and vertical problems that hinder either policy making or implementation, and also lack of coordination and co-operation between different levels in solving certain issues.

Section 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 provide a synthetic view of the results of the first workshop that have been implemented in the 10 selected municipalities. It counts of an average of 10 participants for each workshop, including participants from:

- Municipalities (both civil servants and elected officials)
- Local NGOs of various natures

Understanding of Quality of life and its challenges

The workshops provided an insight into how local communities perceive and understand quality of life. This was discussed among various stakeholders. Topics are reported in the Table 10. The municipalities for which the topics are reported are coded in the following way: AT01 Nenzing, AT02 - Kalkalpen, AT03 - Weyer, DE01 - Grassau, FR01 -, FR02, IT01 - Ala, IT02 - Lanzo, SI01 - Jesenice and SI02 - Črna na Koroškem.

The overview table shows that local communities reported on the usual quality of life topics. However, in some cases, they were more specific, e.g., cultural heritage, local identity, and urban identity. There is also a distinction between the challenges mentioned by most communities and those mentioned only a few times. The accessibility of services was described in the most detail since it is the major issue local communities need to deal with at the moment. Most communities reported a growing need for services for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and youth, as well as dependence on cars and poor public transportation.

Alarmingly, all communities reported "difficulties engaging younger generations in civic and cultural life" as a governance issue. This means the age group that should carry the future development is not interested in this activity. Another governance-related issue raised was the "limited financial resources to support local projects and initiatives aimed at improving residents' quality of life," which indicates the communities' poor capacity to obtain funds and implement projects.

More than half of the local communities also mentioned challenges hindering a better quality of life:

- lack of health workers,
- Need for social spaces, e.g., places where young and elderly citizens can interact daily.
- the necessity to foster innovative and participatory models of civic involvement, including the renewal of third-sector organizations.

Table 10: Reported quality of life *topics and challenges*

Quality of life topics	Challenges	AT 01	AT 02	AT 03	DE 01	FR 01	FR 02	IT 01	IT 02	SI 01	SI 02
Environment	Water supply and quality						X			X	
	Access to preserved nature	X	X		X		X				X
Demographics and accessibility to services	Growing need for services for vulnerable groups, e.g. elderly and youth	X	X	X	X		X	X			X
	Access to essential services and the quality of public transportation are key concerns that directly affect everyday life.		X	X		X	X		X	X	
	Closure of services (post offices banks, ATM)		X	X						X	X
	Lack of shops in villages and remote areas		X	X							X
	Youth outmigration		X	X		X	X				X
	Education opportunities						X			X	X
Infrastructure	Limited internet access										X
	Poor infrastructure, e.g. roads										X
	Sport infrastructure										X
Health and access to healthcare	Lack of health workers	X	X	X	X	X				X	X
Mobility	Dependence on car; poor public transport	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Housing	Limited supply of adequate and affordable housing				X	X	X	X		X	
Economy (economic transition)	Balancing rural traditions with industry, crafts, and services; lack of craftsmen							X		X	
Employment opportunities	Financial safety		X	X			X			X	X
	Limited options for work from home										X
Tourism and culture	Difficulty in positioning the municipality in relation to nearby attractions	X	X	X				X			X
Cultural heritage and local identity	Preservation of architectural, historical, and traditional assets in both the town centre and rural/mountain areas.			X	X		X				X
Urban vitality	Commercial desertification of the historic centre.			X				X			
Social relations	Need for social spaces, e.g. renewed places of daily interaction for young and elderly citizens.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			

Governance	Difficulties in the engagement of younger generations in civic and cultural life	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Community is disconnected	X			X	X	X			X	
	Safety and low crime rate										X
	Necessity to foster innovative and participatory models of civic involvement, including the renewal of third-sector organisations.	X	X	X	X	X		X			
	Limited financial resources to support local projects and initiatives aimed at improving residents' quality of life.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
	Weak local coordination among associations, local authorities, and community stakeholders reduces the effectiveness of collective actions.	X				X			X		
	Lack of strategic vision and coordinated development strategies can lead to missed opportunities and inefficient use of public resources.	X				X			X		

Factors influencing the quality of life and its governance

The workshops offered insight into how local communities perceive and understand quality-of-life governance. This topic was discussed among various stakeholders. The factors to be taken into account are reported in Table 11.

For easier understanding, the factors are divided into general and governance-related categories. The general factors are also related to governance to some extent, as low governance capacities can increase or decrease the importance of individual factors. The most important factors influencing quality of life were efficient local transportation, the quality of the natural environment, demographic change, access to services, the cost of living, and accessibility to housing and public spaces. These topics are recurring and related to quality of life in the Alps, so they should be considered the most relevant to address.

Governance-related factors do not seem to be a common topic among the pilot local communities, or they may not have been discussed in much detail. Most communities, except the Italian ones, mentioned a lack of funds to support local initiatives, as well as limited administrative capacity and expertise due to a lack of staff. To provide participative governance, the level of citizen engagement and youth participation was also brought forward. Although these factors are sampled from only ten Alpine communities, they provide insight into the local Alpine situation and the variety of concerns related to quality-of-life governance.

Table 11: Factors, influencing quality of life

Factors	AT 01	AT 02	AT 03	DE 01	FR 01	FR 02	IT 01	IT 02	SI 01	SI 02
GENERAL FACTORS										
Efficient local and regional transport connections are considered essential for accessibility, mobility, and social inclusion.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
The quality of the natural environment and the surrounding landscape	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Demographic change (youth outmigration, immigration, aging population etc.)	X	X	X	X	X				X	X
Improving access to healthcare and other essential services through integrated and easily accessible local facilities		X	X		X		X	X	X	X
Costs of living	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
Adequate, affordable, and high-quality housing conditions	X			X	X	X		X	X	
Enhancing public spaces and preserving local heritage to improve attractiveness, community life, and economic vitality	X		X	X	X	X	X			
Provision of recreational areas	X		X	X					X	X

Supporting libraries, theatres, events, and community activities		X	X		X		X			X
Supporting social cohesion: Public gathering places, social networks, and opportunities for community participation strengthen the sense of belonging and social inclusion.	X		X	X	X					
Lack of staff in services' provision		X							X	X
Tourism development	X									X
General sense of safety and low crime rate										X
GOVERNANCE-RELATED FACTORS										
Lack of funds to support local initiatives	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Limited administrative capacity (lack of staff) and expertise		X			X	X				X
The level of citizen engagement and youth participation	X	X		X	X	X	X			
Too many policies concern with QoL, but are not integrated or interrelated					X	X			X	
Dependence on EU funds and active participation in EU and cross-border projects									X	X
Good functioning of public institutions (elementary school, health centre, centre for social work ...)									X	
Unrealistic national regulation to be implemented on the local level without extra incentives									X	
Weak regional coordination and unequal regional development										X
Environmental legislation is overly restrictive										X

4. Identification of governance gaps

Working across the Alps has resulted in multiple insights into the governance of quality of life at the local level, which have helped to identify the major gaps in this regard. These gaps can be summarised in five topics, namely: understanding of QoL, governance, funding, civic engagement and public participation, and monitoring and future planning. One needs to consider that these gaps are relevant for small-size Alpine municipalities, including localities with up to 20,000 inhabitants altogether.

1) Understanding of quality of life concept

Interviews and workshops revealed that **understanding of quality of life is mostly place-based**. While local communities have mentioned similar topics, e.g., infrastructure, services, environment, mobility, and access to jobs, they have put a local twist on them. This twist is most commonly conditioned by local characteristics, e.g., steep terrain and the presence of an elderly population. This proves that policies and measures addressing QoL should mostly be developed from the bottom up, focusing on the exact locality. Thus, no common understanding of QoL should be predefined for the Alpine area.

2) Governance framework conditions

Within governance, multiple topics were discussed. First, **poor governance capacity** was identified, meaning smaller municipalities usually have smaller administrations that might lack the human resources and finances to address comprehensive topics such as QoL. While people are generally familiar with this topic, it is demanding to cover and navigate with policies and governance.

A second aspect that falls under governance is **the standard of care or supply**. This refers to the services and provisions that municipalities are obligated to provide as public services and those that could be left to the market. Although there is a common understanding of local needs and desired accessibility for each service, none of the countries have standards for supplying these services. These standards could govern the supply and provide means to supply certain services. Thus, a discussion should be held about which services are necessary to maintain a population in certain areas so that the focus can be on securing them when using public funds.

The third aspect concerns **official governance and the implementation of measures**, which are sometimes left to civil initiatives or ad hoc solutions. While certain aspects of quality of life are regulated, there is room for experimentation and bottom-up solutions in some policy fields if funds are available. In this regard, it was mentioned that local communities are assigned tasks in legislation or regulations from the national level, for which they lack the necessary competence and financing to carry them out properly.

Implementing services or securing good living conditions also relates to **the role of other stakeholders**, not just the municipal administration. Thus, the role of associations and unions in implementing projects, activities, and measures should be discussed and clearly defined. This could support some services with informal delivery or bottom-up solutions.

Regarding dissatisfaction with the governance aspect of quality of life evaluated in the Alpine area, there is also **a lack of understanding among politicians and the public administration** regarding their role and power to influence societal changes and quality of life. This is a relevant issue because the administration may have difficulty attracting new employees and filling certain positions, and the public may question the necessity of these jobs.

3) Funding

Even though **different funds and tools** are available, they are **unclear or too complicated for local communities to implement**. Several obstacles were identified: **lack of information, lack of transparency regarding fund information** such as "how much and for whom," **mismatch between human capacity and the expectations/responsibilities of local governments** when a national regulation is adopted that is supposed to be implemented locally, and **mismatch between what local governments need and what they compete for**. Some argue that **funds are not necessarily distributed where they are needed**, but rather go to more competent local administrations that are familiar with the procedures. Thus, instead of competitive funding mechanisms, there should be better-structured mechanisms for local governments to acquire these funds. Another alternative is to share finances among municipalities to conduct projects.

4) Civic engagement and participation

Civic engagement and participation in quality-of-life issues was not as high as expected. Work in municipalities has shown that locals are not necessarily proactive about matters concerning their quality of life, nor do they engage in local societies. Most communities reported that it is difficult to engage youth, while active elderly individuals were reported.

Participatory processes can be initiated for various reasons. Usually, their legitimacy differs depending on whether they are started and carried out by politicians as part of governance processes or initiated by civil society as a "bottom-up" process. Regarding policy-making processes, some local communities engage locals in workshops or surveys as a participatory technique. As reported during monitoring, these approaches are not standardized, but rather ad hoc.

Different views on civic engagement were provided. For example, it can be seen as legitimizing politicians' efforts under false objectives. It may also not yield good results when policy frameworks are complicated or when conflicts arise between actors.

Communication activities may be well supported, especially in smaller local communities, which may lack the necessary skills and resources. Thus, these municipalities do not build trust through better communication systems and participatory processes, but rather through different methods. When it comes to collaboration between politicians and decision-makers, sharing responsibilities and taking on roles based on their experience and expertise might be supported.

5) Monitoring and future

In general, local communities lack systematic monitoring of quality of life (QoL). Sporadic, ad hoc surveys are usually performed when development strategies are renewed. Existing monitoring systems were identified as project-based, ad hoc, consultation-based, and indirect. None of the municipalities have their own monitoring system since they focus more on short-term policies and



outcomes than on what will happen in the future. Politicians also do not want to learn about the needs or obstacles to quality of life because they might contradict their ideas for local development and investments. In some cases, municipalities monitor their own processes instead of the results of projects, and the extent to which they share the results varies. Furthermore, municipalities do not necessarily know what data they need for better, more data-supported policy or decision-making because they are unaware of what data already exists and how to retrieve and analyze it.

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University of Ljubljana (2025) Interview campaign with Slovenian Municipalities conducted between June and September 2025.

Annexes

Annex 1. Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT GOVERNANCE OF QoL IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

We kindly ask you to participate in the interview for the project GOVQoL - Empowering local governance of Alpine communities for a better QoL. The aim of the project is to gather the insight into the local governance of QoL in the Alpine area. More precisely, we are interested into what policies exist on the local level to address QoL, how they are implemented, who are the major stakeholders, how is the civic society engaged into policy making and implementation, and other relevant questions. Our target group for the interviews are persons from the municipalities' administration, responsible to address QoL, e.g. via spatial planning, sectoral policies, development policies. In municipalities of smaller size, also mayors can be the target person.

The interviews should be performed either in person or online in the period from April until June 15th 2025. Each interviewee should sign the form that they agree to the interview etc.

This questionnaire presents the situation in municipality: **INSERT name of the municipality, country.**

Interviewer: **INSERT your name, surname and email.**

1. Quality of life (QoL) can be named with different terms and also understood in various ways. How do you understand this term in your municipality? What does it mean?

2. Which factors currently contribute/impact the most QoL in your municipality?

3. Does your municipality have a policy specific for QoL that was adopted particularly for the purpose of securing high QoL in your local community? Please, state the name(s), year of adoption and aims and objectives of such document(s).

4. What other local policy documents or regulation steer QoL in your municipality? What are their objectives?

An example of such document would be a local development programme or similar strategy. Name the documents, their type and what their aims are.

5. What other policies and regulation from other governance levels (regional, national, supranational) do you also implement and are relevant for securing good quality of life?

An example of such policy would be [Slovenian Development Strategy 2030](#), an umbrella document on the national level to steer the development in general. Its main objective is good quality of life for everyone. Furthermore, these could be standards for services provision etc.

6. In your opinion, what are the main barriers to policy making concerning QoL? What are those for policy implementation? For example, among such barriers one could name not the right scale, tricky investments, no political will.

7. Do you implement any initiatives, measures or instruments with the specific purpose to improve QoL? Do they target specifically any of the vulnerable social groups, like elderly and youth?

Please, describe them briefly. *These measures could contribute to better policy making, e.g. consideration of QoL while preparing sectoral policies, implementing assessment tools, measures to improve infrastructure and other spatial planning measures concerning QoL. If there are plenty of such measures, name and describe a few, and mention there are more.*

8. Who are the main stakeholders in your local community that may be relevant/involved in activities/initiatives regarding QoL including policy implementation? Please, name them and explain their role for securing QoL.

9. How does your local community/municipality engage local civil society in QoL-related initiatives/activities? How do you specifically involve young people?

10. Do you in any way monitor QoL or satisfaction with it in your municipality? How and how often?

11. Which factors will impact the most QoL in your municipality in the next 20 years?

Explain how for each of the factors you have named.

12. If you would like to add something, e.g. you know of any other studies, projects about QoL that could be useful for preparation of the report, please do so here.

We thank you kindly for your support and answers.

Annex 2: Protocol for Workshop 1

Aims of the workshops

The GOVQoL project aims to understand how QoL can be enhanced in the Alpine communities. Aiming to gain a broader perspective on the topic, several workshops will be organised in different phases of the project to foster a more inclusive approach through connecting various stakeholders and facilitating knowledge exchange. During these workshops,

- The GOVQoL project will be introduced to local actors and communities, and their perspectives on QoL in their local contexts will be explored.
- Integration of QoL into existing local policies and regulations will be evaluated.
- New ways to enhance QoL in the local governments will be identified.

Three different workshops will be designed to explore how QoL has been implemented by the municipal authorities and experienced within the local communities for 10 distinct cases (2 per country covered by the consortium partners). The workshops will be conducted on-site and are expected to take place between July 2025 and June 2026, comprising three different sessions per local community. The suggested timeline for the individual workshop is:

- First workshop in Summer-Autumn, 2025 (June–September 2025)
- Second Workshop at the beginning of 2026 (January–February 2026)
- Third Workshop in Late Spring-Early Summer, 2026 (May–June 2026).

Each session is expected to last up to 3-4 hours max, although the duration may vary depending on the number of participants and the depth of the discussions. The anticipated number of participants is 10 to 15 people, but this may vary depending on the size of the municipalities. For small municipalities (with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants), up to 10 participants are expected. For larger municipalities, the expected number of participants is around 15. The participants are expected to be from different fields to have a broader understanding of local communities' experiences and approaches. To do so, the recommended participants can be listed as follows:

- Representative of the municipal administration, responsible for spatial planning
- Representative of the municipal administration, responsible for social matters
- Representatives from local service providers (education, health, utilities, public transport)
- Local and regional non-governmental organisations, dealing with the topic

The workshop protocol, which is inspired by the [ESPON Living Lab approach](#), is developed and translated by project partners into relevant Alpine languages to support effective local engagement.

Participants and Workshops' management

The key participants during the workshop will be the moderator, local actors (politicians, practitioners, etc.), public representatives from the citizens, and experts/researchers from the GOVQoL team. And the responsibilities of key participants can be listed as:

- *Moderator:* The moderator's role is to facilitate the flow of the event, ensuring discussions stay focused, time is respected, and all participants are engaged. The moderator helps

achieve the workshop's objectives by guiding interactions, summarising key points, and managing group dynamics.

- *The local facilitator(s)*: municipality staff supporting the organisation and logistics of the workshop. The facilitator(s) will work together with the expert team to ensure smooth coordination, active participation, and alignment with the workshop's objectives.
- *Working group*: A group of 10 to 15 participants from the local communities that can be limited to central stakeholders only or open to all citizens. It should be made clear from the beginning that the results of the working group are not mandatory for implementation by the municipality – decisions are made only by the elected council.

Workshop methods

Brainstorming and other participative techniques will be the key method for the workshops to gain insights into how QoL is understood in the local contexts:

- *Speed-dating*: Two people discuss a predefined question for a short time (3-5 minutes), then they change partners for a new conversation and question; afterwards, the results are collected in the group^[1].
- *World Café*: *small groups discuss various topics*. Topics for the World Café must be selected in advance by the steering group, or participants can bring issues relevant to them.
- *Brainstorming* will be used to invite participants to think about the predefined topics, and, along with speed-dating, it is suitable for gaining insight into individuals' ideas about QoL and what contributes to it.
- *Others to be explored case by case*

The discussions will be moderated by an expert to summarise the key points discussed among the small groups.

Structure of the Workshop 1

Aim

The workshop aims to gain insights into how local communities perceive the concept of QoL and to identify the key factors that influence its governance at the local level. By engaging with a diverse group of stakeholders, including local administrators and community members, the workshop promotes bottom-up discussions about how QoL has been implemented and how these implementations have influenced the daily lives of inhabitants. Furthermore, through this workshop, informal exchange and networking opportunities will also be fostered during the scheduled breaks.

Guiding questions to be addressed

- Question 1 - What does quality of life mean to you? Please specify from the personal/individual/subjective aspects (i.e., lifestyle, personal behaviour, etc.) to those that are more related to objective aspects of quality of life (i.e. services, environmental quality, etc.)

- Question 2 - According to you, which are the topics/themes that affect quality of life in your community?
- Question 3 - According to your experience, what are the factors that affect (positively or negatively) local governance the most in delivering policies aiming at improving the quality of life of your communities?
- Question 4 - How can you assess these factors?

Workshop's Phases

Based on the workshop objectives and guiding questions, a 4-phase event is planned.

- *Phase 1 - Welcome and Warm-up.* As a warm-up for the participants, the Mayor/Leader/Initiator of the workshop should first give a welcoming talk and introduction, followed by a round of introductions among the participants (depending on the number of participants). The activity should not be longer than 30 minutes.
- *Phase 2 – Setting the Context through Speed Dating.* Participants will be invited to share their opinions about QoL in their local communities within 2-person groups for a short period. The activity should not be longer than 60 minutes.
- *Phase 3 – Selection and Prioritisation.* Implementing the World Café, small groups of 3-4 people (depending on the number of participants) will be created, and their opinions will be sought regarding what affects the quality of life in their territory (positively or negatively). The activity should not be longer than 60 minutes.
- *Phase 4 – Conclusion.* With the guidance of the leader/experts, the results of the discussions will be collected from the small groups and presented to all. This will allow us to validate the workshop results with participants. The activity should not be longer than 30 minutes.

While the predefined questions will be used to invite participants to think about the concept of QoL individually, the speed-dating and world café sessions will provide them with opportunities to share their perspectives with other stakeholders. Lastly, the outcomes of the individuals' and group brainstorming sessions will be collected by the experts during the consolidation session.

Expected outcomes

The outcomes of the discussions will lay the groundwork for understanding the perception of quality of life and the enabling and hindering factors in each of the 10 communities involved across the five countries represented by the consortium. The results will help complement Project Activity 1.4 – Identification of Governance Gaps and Local Communities' Needs (part of which will be gathered through the interview campaign). Moreover, this first workshop will collect information that will lay the groundwork for developing the roadmap (Activity 2.4, Deliverable 2.4.1).

^[1] **Note-taking by participants:** Each person writes key points or insights on sticky notes, worksheets, or templates provided in advance