

Interreg



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Alpine Space

GOVQoL

Output 1.1:

**Identification of governance gaps and local needs
for preparation of place-based policies concerning
QoL within the Alpine area**

June 2026



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



The Output 1.1 was created as part of the Interreg Alpine Space project *GOVQoL – Empowering local governance of Alpine communities for a better quality of life.*

Project partners University of Ljubljana
 Politecnico di Torino
 Alliance in the Alps
 CIPRA France

Authors Naja Marot, Pina Klara Petrović Jesenovec, Erblin Berisha, Cemre Betul Ay,
 Katharina Gasteiger, Maya Knevels, Lauren Mosdale, Julika Jarosch

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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*”, aims at strengthening local governance, engaging stakeholders, and fostering place-based solutions aligned with Alpine-wide policies. More to that, it is important that the local needs and challenges are first identified and assessed, and the knowledge exchange is facilitated.

Thus, Output 1.1 was planned by the project to analyse current local governance of QoL, assessed it, and reflect on it. This is important for other project activities, since only well-defined needs and gaps can contribute to improvement of the skills of local administrators, and building their capacity. Having this in mind, Output 1.1 capitalises 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. It is based on multiple activities, done in the project so far:

- Interviews with the stakeholders (52 municipalities across the Alps; Activity 1.2);
- Conceptual workshops in pilot communities (10 municipalities; Activity 1.3);
- Internal workshop within the project (Activity 1.4);
- Roundtable within the Alpine Convention visit of the info points in Slovenia, and
- Discussions carried out through the two transnational seminars.

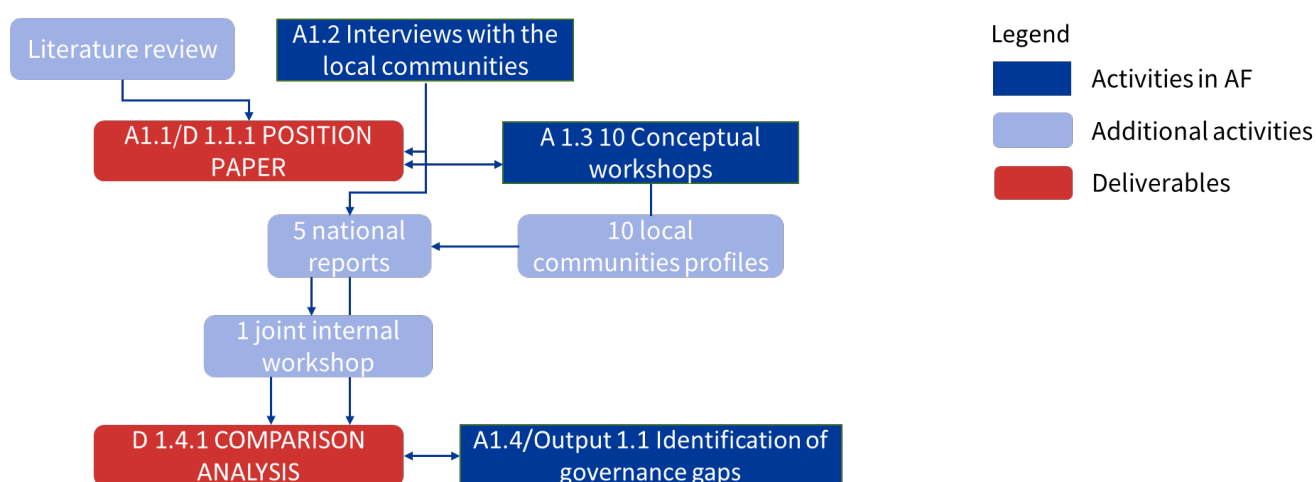
In this way, Output 1.1 provides elaborated knowledge and understanding of the needs of the local communities in five Alpine countries (Austria, Germany, France, Italy, and Slovenia), but mostly gives a comparative overview of how local communities deal with QoL within their governance frameworks. The 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. In such manner, the results correspond back to the outcomes and recommendation of the 10th Report on the State of the Alps concerning governance and the need for more knowledge, and also to some of the work done within EUSALP, like focus of the Action Group 1. More to that, the results illustrate that in the Alpine area, the social aspects should be also carefully considered, and addressed via the policy making and governance instruments.

Above all, the results confirm the observations from the field in regards to the QoL of the Alpine people, and the identified gaps provide a good start for introduction of measures on multiple governance levels to improve not only the quality of life of Alpine residence, but also its governance.

2. Methodological steps

The methodological approach combined a qualitative, multi-level perspective with participatory tools to engage institutional local actors. The **QoL** is understood as **a multidimensional concept**, 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** was defined 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**. Based on this an integrated inductive–deductive approach has been adopted, combining the participative techniques (interviews, workshop) with the findings of the previous studies, and extensive work with the stakeholders. The exact step of the Output 1.1 preparation are presented in the Figure 1.

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



The empirical core of this output 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, 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.

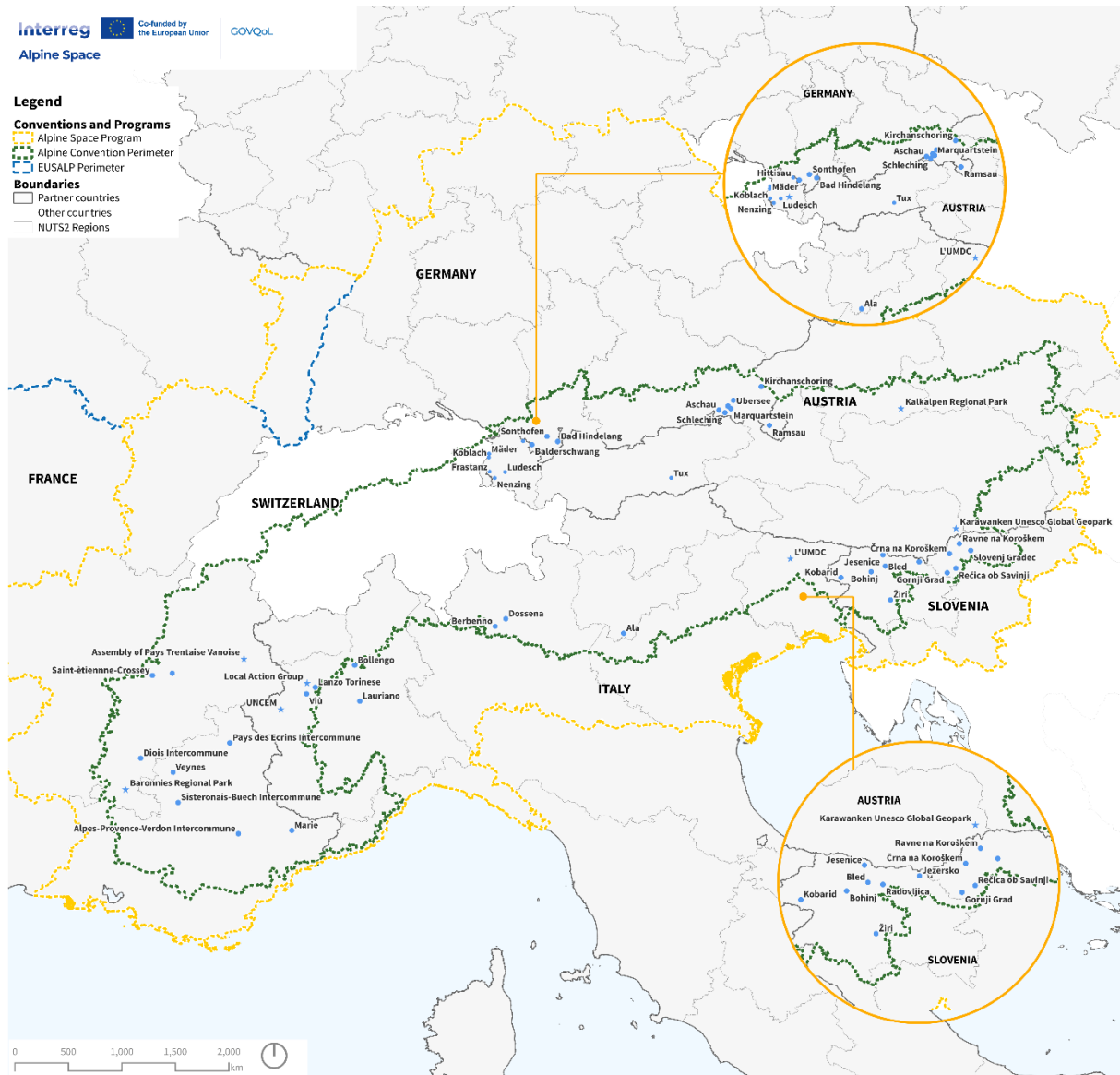
The interview campaign followed a semi-structured format consisting of 12 questions exploring (i) participants' **perceptions of QoL**; (ii) their understanding of the relationship between QoL, governance, and policy; (iii) the tools used to address QoL-related issues; (iv) their implementation and monitoring 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 Output 1.1 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. In Chapter 3 of the output, only a selection of tables is presented, so for more in-depth knowledge, it is recommended to read the Deliverable 1.4.1, where more results are presented.

Besides the workshops with the local communities, **an internal workshop** was carried out in October 2025 during the on-site meeting of the partners. During this workshop partners presented their work in the local communities, and elaborated on the comparative elements between the Alpine communities and common traits. This was done using the leading questions for discussion. The workshop at the same time served as a starting point for preparation of Deliverable 1.4.1. More elaboration on the challenges and gaps was possible during the engagement of transnational stakeholders into the transnational and national seminars. Within these seminars, also the presentation of the good practices revealed what are the current needs of the local communities, and what needs to be improved in the local governance. In addition, the present local communities have expressed their concerns and challenges in regards to QoL.

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.



Interviewed Institutions

Austria

- Municipality of Frastanz
- Hittisau
- Municipality of Koblach
- Municipality of Ludesch
- Municipality of Mäder
- Municipality of Nenzing
- Municipality of Tux
- ★ Grosses Walsertal Biosphere Reserve
- ★ Kalkalpen Regional Park
- ★ Karawanken Unesco Global Geopark

Germany

- Municipality of Sonthofen
- Municipality of Schleching
- Municipality of Marquartstein
- Municipality of Balderschwang
- Municipality of Bad Hindelang
- Municipality of Aschau
- Municipality of Kirchanschoring
- Municipality of Ramsau
- Municipality of Uebersee
- Municipality of Grassau

France

- Alpes-Provence-Verdon Intercommune
- Diois Intercommune
- Marie
- Saint-étienne-Crossey
- Pays des Ecrins Intercommune
- Saint-Pierre-d'Entremont
- Sisteronais-Buech Intercommune
- Veynes Commune
- ★ Baronnies Regional Park
- ★ Assembly of Pays Tarentaise Vanoise

Italy

- Municipality of Ala
- Municipality of Lanzo Torinese
- Municipality of Lauriano
- Municipality of Viù
- Municipality of Berbenno
- Municipality of Bollengo
- Municipality of Dossena
- ★ L'UMDC
- ★ LAG of Lanzo, Ceronda and Casternone
- ★ UNCEM

Slovenia

- Municipality of Bled
- Municipality of Bohinj
- Municipality of Črna na Koroškem
- Municipality of Gornji Grad
- Municipality of Jesenice
- Municipality of Jezersko
- Municipality of Kobarid
- Municipality of Radovljica
- Municipality of Ravne na Koroškem
- Municipality of Rečica ob Savinji
- Municipality of Slovenj Gradec
- Municipality of Žiri

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

3. Local needs and challenges of quality of life

Local needs and challenges

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 1 and Table 2. As the Table 1 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 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 1: 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 2 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 2: 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.

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 3.

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 3: 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. 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.

