

Valle d'Aosta - Conference on EUSALP's Smart Villages strategy

On Thursday 23rd and Friday 24th May 2019, Courmayeur was the venue for a two-day conference on Smart Villages, one of the events organised under the 2019 Italian Presidency of the European Strategy for the Alpine Regional (EUSALP). During the meeting, Valle d'Aosta became the centre of Europe, bringing together technical and political representatives who, in future years, will be implementing the solutions put forward to ensure that villages become intelligent. The announcement was made by the Presidency of the Region and the Regional Ministry of European Affairs, Labour Policies, Social Inclusion and Transport.

Mountain and rural villages must become increasingly smart, i.e. intelligent, so that people who live in the Alps can remain within their territory, enjoying the same opportunities as people who live in cities, through the implementation of smart solutions that can ensure the provision of basic services and sustainable economic development, even in seemingly disadvantaged areas. In the opinion of the political authorities and the technical experts who spoke at the conference, the Alps are no longer a periphery, but Europe's new centre and driving force. The Alps were once seen as a hinge area between different territories, but today, thanks to intelligent villages, they are again an attractive area. They are no longer at a disadvantage compared to metropolitan areas, but instead, they are even more attractive because they provide a key advantage: a higher quality of life. Several initiatives consistent with the smart villages approach, launched by the European Commission in 2017, were presented during the event. They are examples of tailor-made solutions created directly by local communities.

Hence, not a single model, but a flexible approach towards implementing local development while at the same time following common guidelines: first and foremost, citizen participation and the engagement of political representatives. This is seen as a critical element in developing a joint vision in considering issues of common interest throughout the alpine region. What emerged, unequivocally, was the central role of smart villages in the development strategy of the Alpine area and the importance of introducing, through EUSALP, flexible regulations that can be used to implement specific smart village initiatives in different countries, despite the existence of different regulatory frameworks.



The event was organised by the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta and Action Group 5 (connectivity and accessibility to services of general interest), in collaboration with Action Groups 3 (training), 4 (mobility) and 9 (energy), within the framework of the Italian Presidency of the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), a strategy launched by the 22 regions and 26 cantons of the 7 countries that have an Alpine presence.

Smart villages are a bottom up idea. As stated by Raffaele Cattaneo, Councilor for the Environment and Climate of the Lombardy Region and coordinator of EUSALP in the year of the Italian Presidency, Alpine Region "is opening up to a new centrality, which needs to make use of tools and services which the large cities already have and this is possible thanks to the Smart Villages. An idea coming out from the bottom up, with a subsidiary perspective, which does involve not only the institutions, but the social involvement and proactivity, for a new way of thinking about the territory and providing new opportunities for growth and development".

Despite being a vibrant and attractive territory in terms of tourism, nature and history, unfortunately, mountain areas also face several challenges, including the depopulation of small mountain villages – as Antonio Fosson, the President of the Autonomous Region of Aosta Valley, stated during the opening session of the event. To counter this trend, Smart Villages, a new concept for rural villages, is essential and features, among other possible solutions, the use of new technologies for innovative solutions in small towns and rural areas to secure the provision of basic services and sustainable economic development.

Smart villages is a call to responsibility, almost a revolution in which environmental issues are no longer seen as constraints but as the key to future development," stated Luigi Bertschy, Regional Minister for European Affairs, Labour Policies and Social Inclusion of the Aosta Valley. Through this approach, Alpine villages become innovation hubs for a new development of the Alps. Today, thanks to local and global technology, innovation and tradition are not mutually exclusive, rather they become complementary terms that create opportunities that respond both to territorial and to people's needs. Indeed, technology empowers us so that we can create new professional skills as well as new opportunities, including employment opportunities based on digital experiences.

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Source: Regional Ministry for European Affairs, Labour Policies, Social Inclusion and Transport and Presidency of the Region - Press Office of the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste.