

ACTION GROUP 5



To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services

Intermediate report 2016-2019

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80 million people, 7 countries, 48 regions,
mountains and plains addressing together
common challenges and opportunities



Index

| | |
|--|----|
| ACTION GROUP 5 | 1 |
| <i>To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services</i> | 1 |
| 1 Aims and background of the report | 3 |
| 2 Mission statement | 3 |
| 3 Implement the Smart villages concept | 3 |
| 4 Analyse the feasibility of a digital backbone of the Alps | 6 |
| 5 Transfer the knowledge on digitalisation to SME's | 7 |
| 6 Improve the Access to Services of general interest | 8 |
| 7 Improve crossborder mobility for commuters in the alpine area | 9 |
| 8 Provide the basis for a better governance and financial schemes in the field of digitalisation and accessibility to services | 12 |
| 9 Outlook | 12 |

1 Aims and background of the report

The action plan for the macroregional strategy for the alpine region EUSALP was formally adopted in July 2015. The strategy relies on four pillars (economy, accessibility, resources and governance) which are put into practise through the work of nine action groups. The action groups started their work in 2016 and are financed through an Alpine space program project called AlpGov.

Action Group 5 is co-lead by the Autonomous Region Valle d'Aosta and the Swiss Centre for mountain regions SAB. AG5 formally started its work in March 2016. After three years and in view of the upcoming AlpGov II – project it is time to summarize where AG5 stands and where it intends to go to. The present report will therefore summarize the main achievements of AG5 in the period 2016 to 2019 and give an outlook on upcoming activities.

2 Mission statement

Digitalization through connectivity and digital services can be the answer to the critical challenges the Alpine regions, especially in the rural and mountain areas, have to face in terms of depopulation, brain drain, physical barriers, accessibility to welfare and economic growth. The focus of AG5 action is twofold. On the one hand, to draw up a comprehensive strategy for guiding and shaping the ongoing process of digitisation in the Alpine Region and, on the other hand, the accessibility to services which are provided by public authorities to people living within a certain area. This can be achieved by making the best use of new available technologies as well as developing take-up of e-services.

In a short sentence, Action Group 5 wants to build a common political vision based on the capacity of the Alps to be **forerunners of digitalisation**.

To achieve this goal, AG5 has developed a series of very concrete activities, which should be to the benefit of the alpine population and the alpine economy. These activities are shortly described in the following chapters.

3 Implement the Smart villages concept

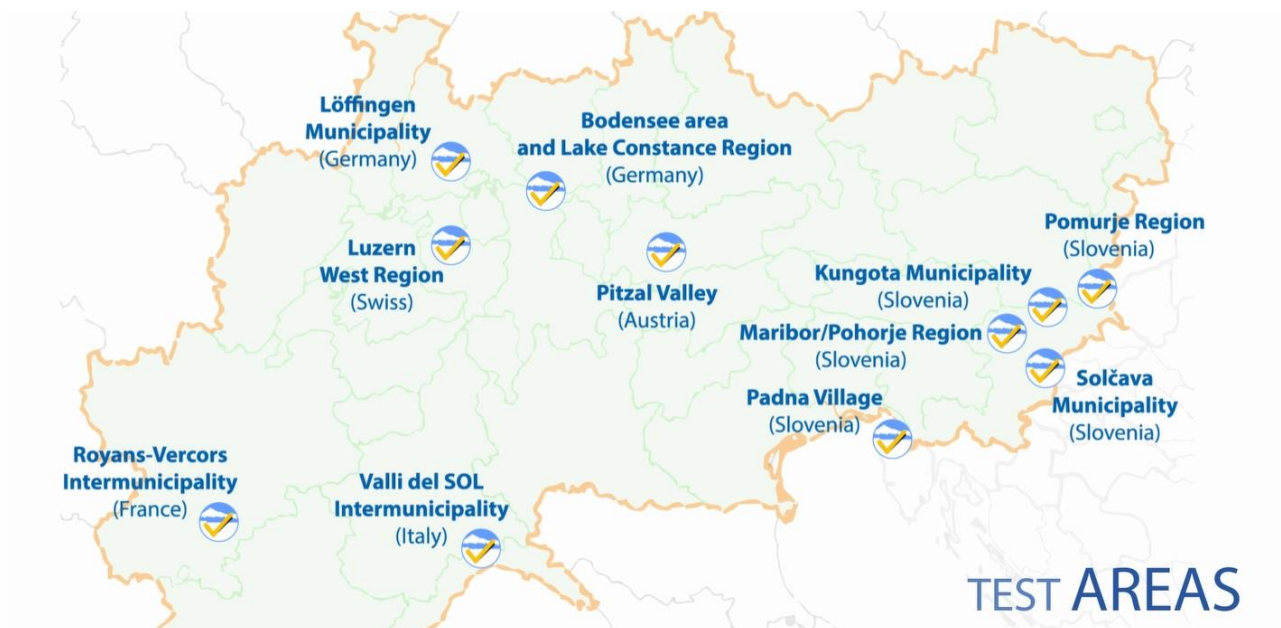
The idea to transpose the concept of smart cities to rural municipalities in the alpine area is one of the major strategic initiatives of AG5. AG5 has launched an Alpine space program project on this topic which runs from April 2018 to April 2021.

The project aims to apply the Smart villages approach and bring together - in so-called Regional Stakeholder Groups (policy makers, business, academia and civil society) to improve the framework for innovation through new forms of stakeholder involvement facilitated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The project is therefore not a technology orientated project. It is a user orientated project which shall show the opportunities and potentials of digitalization for rural communities. The active involvement of this population into the elaboration of the project in the various test areas is therefore crucial.

The outputs envisaged by the project are:

- Nine Regional Stakeholder Groups which will assist the assessment of smartness level of Test Areas, give input for best practices and test the Digital Exchange Platform (DEP), codesign the toolbox and facilitate the transfer of project results to the policy level.
- A regional analysis providing the readiness and needs for a Smart Transition in the Test Areas.
- The creation of a Digital Exchange Platform for the transnational knowledge sharing of the project findings within the project as well as with the wider public.
- The elaboration of a Toolbox to access digital tools, methods and techniques that facilitate user engagement and the development of products with high value for the SV ecosystem in all Test Areas.
- Policy Recommendations compiled in a synthesis report by evaluating results and effects of the project.

The test areas participating in the Smart villages project can be identified from the following picture:



The Smart villages approach has many connections to other Action groups. AG5 is therefore cooperating with other AG's on this topic. The Smart villages approach was presented at the EUSALP-Annual forum in November 2017 in Munich and a major event took place in May 2019 in Courmayeur, organized by Aosta Valley Autonomous Region in the framework of the Italian presidency of EUSALP. These events gave the smart villages approach a high visibility and political relevance in the alpine area and contribute to sharpen the profile of EUSALP also outside the Alps.

For more information, see <https://www.alpine-region.eu/projects/smart-villages>

4 Analyse the feasibility of a digital backbone of the Alps



This strategic initiative wants to increase the connectivity and accessibility of the border regions in the Alps.

AG5 has developed a feasibility study to find potential infrastructures (already existing) to be used in cross border connectivity, underlying the existing gaps and how they can be filled. The study also aims to highlight economic models that can be developed with such connectivity.

Starting from an overview in marginal areas, the study has developed some economic models, enabling infrastructures and practical applications to boost sustainable growth of territories enabled by connectivity and digital ecosystems.

The topic of connectivity (e.g. digital connectivity) is becoming increasingly important as it's now fundamental in many process of our life, from entertainment to transportation or healthcare. Alpine areas cannot remain out of this trend so it's crucial to develop a digital strategy for Alpine Region where connectivity is available and pervasive as in main cities to develop all kind of services that are (or will) needed for Region development. Some ideas and projects already exist in

different countries/regions of Alpine Area but they're not coordinated with each other and often their exploitation do not follow some basic request of availability and performances that are important now but will be mandatory in the future with the arrival of 5G next generation networks, the spread of IoT and the diffusion of Near Real Time applications.

To match these requirements there is need of more transnational fiber optic backbones and more infrastructures in cross border areas to be used by industry operators and public administrations:

- Optical fibers (or already existing physical paths to host them – e.g. ducts)
- Towers to host radio devices in case of radio access
- Neutral spaces to locate compute/cloud resources that can provide services closed to end users

About optical fibers or enabling infrastructures, in particular, they're the key parts of a cross border reliable ecosystem: while mountain territory does not allow redundant infrastructures in each region/country, having an open cross border ecosystem is often the answer to such needs but means going further to actual market organization, with the opportunity to share some resources in different areas, included R&D.

With this strategic initiative this lack shall be covered and a common understanding of the topic and strategic approach to improve the situation be developed.

AG5 focused on all infrastructures enabling cross border connectivity in order to develop state of the art and reliable networks allowing actual and future proof digital services to Alpine region. Moreover AG5 will provide an indication of new economic applications that can be activated on top of them.

For more information, see <https://www.alpine-region.eu/publications/cross-border-connectivity-alpine-region>

5 Transfer the knowledge on digitalisation to SME's

A lot of knowledge on digitalisation is available at the level of universities, research institutes and with consultants. But how can we transfer this knowledge to the very small enterprise which prevail in the alpine area and which are simply overwhelmed by daily business. This is the starting point for a common initiative launched by AG2, AG3 and AG5 in August 2019. The project is financed via the Alpine Region Preparatory Fund (ARPAF) and runs until January 2021. SAB as Co-Leader of AG5 is lead partner of the project, encompassing furthermore partners from Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia. The project will

- map existing research institutions and private enterprises with available knowlegde on digitalisation for very small SME's,
- collect good practises and existing tools,
- develop new approaches,

- elaborate recommendations for further actions.

The main target groups for this project are very small enterprises in the alpine area. The project therewith complements the activities in the smart villages project, which has a larger focus and addresses mainly municipalities and their inhabitants and the backbone initiative, which looks at the infrastructure side.

For more information, see <https://www.alpine-region.eu/projects/smart-smes>

6 Improve the Access to Services of general interest

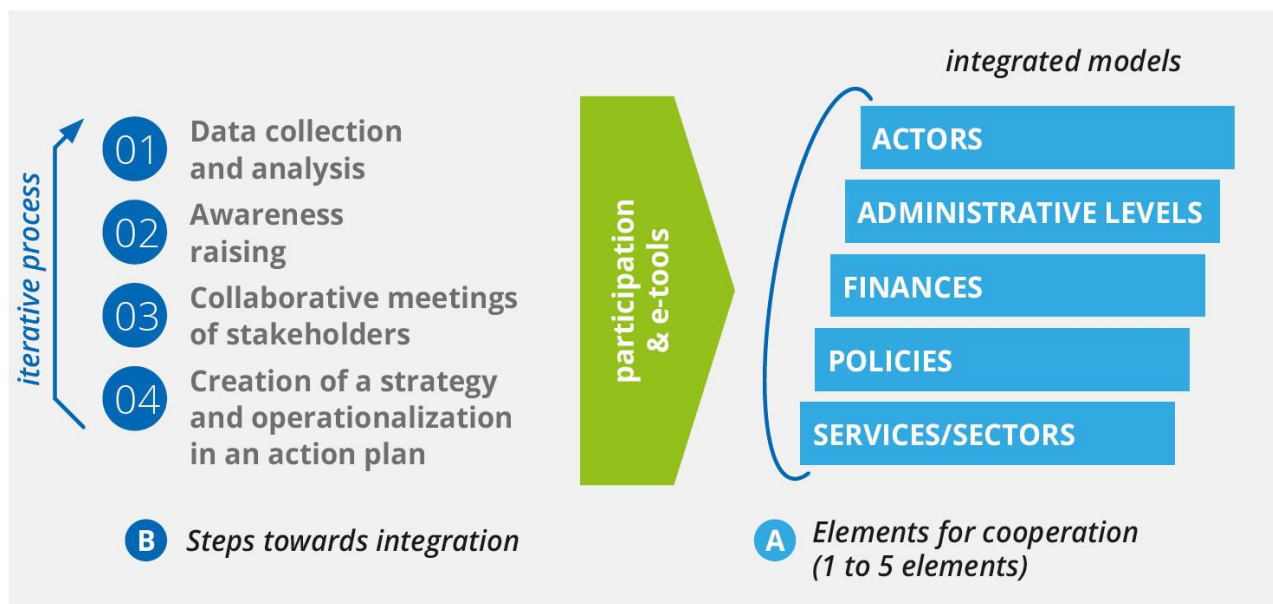
An improved accessibility to Services of general interest SGI and a better organisation of these services by an integrated, territorial approach is one of the priorities of AG5. AG5 has delivered in this respect the findings of the Alpine space program project INTESI. INTESI actually started even before AG5 in December 2015 and concluded in December 2018.

Within the INTESI project, 10 partners from 5 countries worked to overcome the sectoral approach to delivering SGI by promoting better coordination and inclusion into integrated territorial strategies.

In a first stage, the project collected and analysed all the SGI strategies relevant for the Alpine Space. This provided researchers with a state-of-play of SGI delivery, challenges, needs and opportunities. After that, regional profiles of the 10 test areas were elaborated revealing their needs in terms of SGI with regard to demographic development and accessibility and a collaborative exchange platform for the design of 8 pilot actions – the implementation of concrete measures for SGI integration – was built up.

In the framework of INTESI, 8 pilot activities were implemented in test areas in order to experiment on integrated, territorial SGI strategies. Based on project findings the INTESI project elaborated an intervention model on SGI integration and 7 recommendations for decision makers in a so called [handbook](#).

The INTESI-approach to SGI-integration can be summarized in the following graph:



Approaches to SGI integration and best practices were shared by the partnership with the INTESI think tank that is a platform for the exchange of best practices on the provision of SGIs across the Alps. In addition to identifying upcoming challenges for SGI, the think tank discusses policy recommendations, reflects on the work of SGI projects and proposes solutions on the technical and political level.

The think tank created by the project became a subgroup of “EUSALP Action Group 5: To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services” and will continue its work under moderation of the Swiss Center for Mountain Regions. In addition, the project results will be transformed into regional strategies in several alpine countries. Last but not least the INTESI project finds its continuation in the EUSALP macroregional strategy Action Group 5 (“To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services”) which will integrate its findings in the macroregional action plan.

For more information, see <https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/intesi/en/home>

7 Improve crossborder mobility for commuters in the alpine area

Transport networks have for a long time been planned in a purely national context. These transport networks therefore are no longer in coherence with the increasing passenger flows across borders. This holds particularly true for public transport systems. Most of the commuter’s

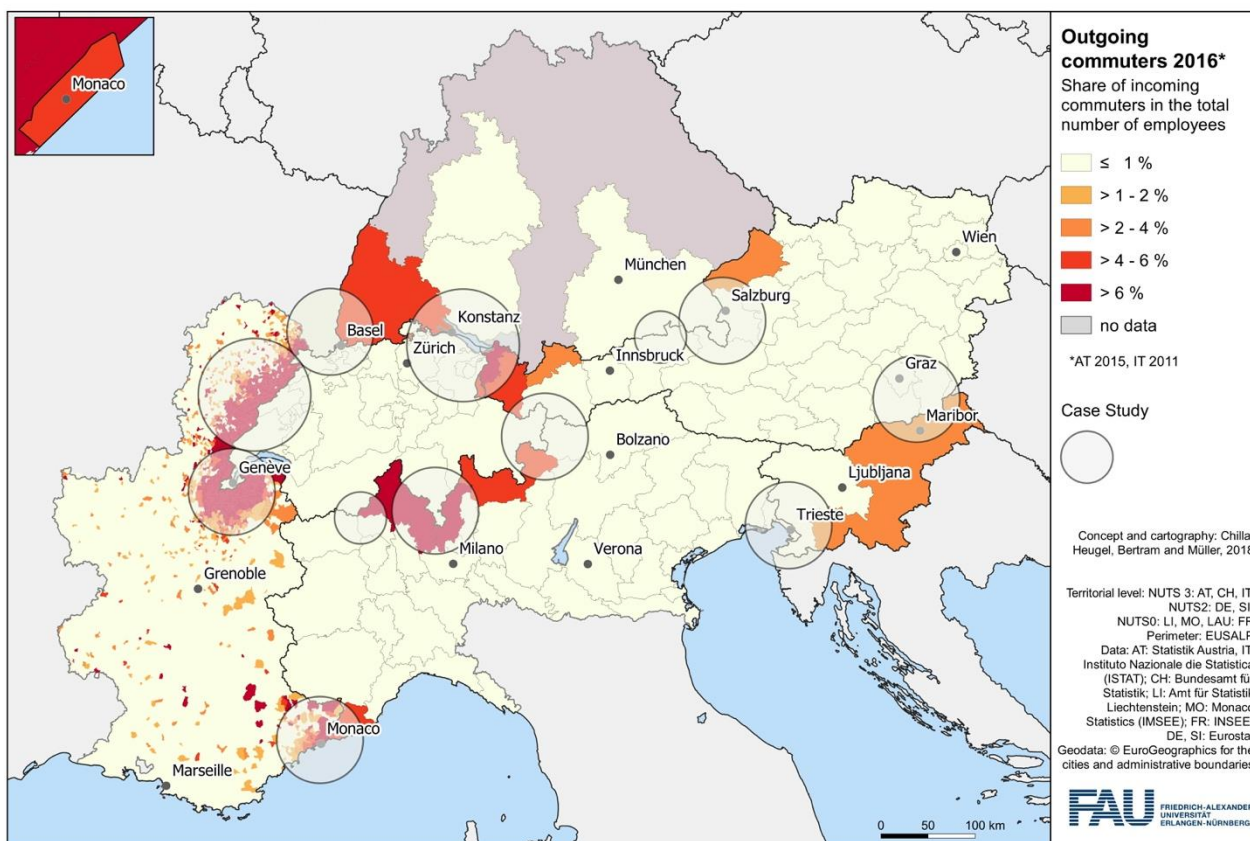
transport flows across borders are by car. Congested roads with a negative impact on economy, society and the environment are the consequence.

The aims of the project are:

1. To establish an overview of cross-border mobility across the Alpine Region with a focus on daily commuting;
2. To identify gaps of cross-border mobility with respect to infrastructure and soft factors;
3. To identify solutions for facilitating daily cross-border passenger flows by sustainable transport modes through new opportunities offered by digitalisation;
4. To provide a basis for future activities of AG4 and AG5 of EUSALP;
5. To implement the findings in several hotspots for cross-border-commuting in the Alpine Region.

This project has been financed by the Alpine Region Preparatory Fund (ARPAF) and runs from January 2018 to December 2019. The project is a joint initiative by AG5 and AG4 (mobility).

The project delivered for the first time ever an overview of cross-border commuting in the EUSALP-perimeter. The report elaborated by the University Erlangen-Nuremberg includes an analysis of the quality of connections for road and rail infrastructure in twelve selected case studies. It allows classifying and comparing hotspots of cross-border commuting in the EUSALP perimeter. The share of cross-border commuting within the EUSALP perimeter is significantly higher than the European average values, underlining the high relevance of the topic for mobility in the Alpine Region. Roughly 2 million workers cross a national border in Europe each day to go to work. In the EUSALP perimeter, this figure amounts to roughly 600'000 persons. This phenomenon has in the past been largely neglected on the international level. EUSALP is an ideal platform to discuss about it and to search for solutions.



The ARPAF-project listed the existing solutions to this phenomenon and also looked at other solutions outside the alpine area. High-potential cooperation models possibly applicable to other Alpine regions have been defined and illustrated in a Storymap: [START EXPLORING: COMMUTER COOPERATION MODELS.](#)

Furthermore, a toolbox has been developed, that encompasses concrete measures for enterprises to encourage sustainable commuter mobility. The toolbox focusses on (1) organizational measures and incentive systems, (2) infrastructure measures and (3) information, actions and campaigns. The Toolbox is available for download in all Alpine Languages: [\[EN\]](#) [\[DE\]](#) [\[FR\]](#) [\[IT\]](#) [\[SI\]](#).

The results of this project will be summarized in a final report which encompasses also policy recommendations and will be published for and presented at the Annual forum in November 2019 in Milan.

For more information, see <https://www.alpine-region.eu/projects/arpaf-cross-border>

8 Provide the basis for a better governance and financial schemes in the field of digitalisation and accessibility to services

AG5 has elaborated two studies which were required by the AlpGov-project. In the first study, the governance mechanisms in the fields of E-Services and of SGI were analysed. The report was published in June 2018.

In the second study, the financial mechanisms relevant for the topics of AG5 were analysed in detail. The study covered the EU level as well as all national levels and selected regional levels. The report was published in July 2018. One of the results is a table synthetizing the available funding instruments and providing input for a better harmonisation of the funding instruments on EU-level.

| | AG Activity | INTERREG Alpine Space Programme | INTERREG Cross-border Programme | ERDF Mainstream Programme | Horizon Europe Programme | DIGITAL Europe | CEF Programme | LEADER Programme |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | Implement a 'virtual mass' infrastructure of cross-border fiber-optic backbones shared among public institutions and private operators to fill the connectivity gap in the Alpine area | | | 051, 055 | Pillar II: Cluster "Digital and Industry" | | CEF Telecom - Digital broadband infrastructures | |
| 2 | Foster a network of 'proximity data centers' to support low-latency 5G-enabled critical services diffusion, Disaster recovery and Business continuity services as change and common digital ecosystems adoption | | | 55 | Pillar II: Cluster "Digital and Industry" | | CEF Telecom - Digital services infrastructures | |
| 3 | Develop a set of vertical pilots for low latency services enabled by 5G networks and AI on mobility, tourism/agriculture, energy efficiency, risk management | | | 053, 055, 036, 037, 038, 063, 070, 076, 128, 129, 130 | Pillar II: - Cluster "Digital and Industry" - Cluster "Climate, energy and mobility" | Ensuring the wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society; Artificial Intelligence | | |
| 4 | Promote the Smart Villages approach in the Alpine Area | Ongoing ASP-project | Contribution to all Interreg-specific objectives as outlined in Art. 14 of COM(2018) 374 | Intervention fields 012, 013, 053, 063, 063, 073, 078, 084, 095, 106, 108, 121, 122, 123, 124 | Pillar II: - Cluster "Digital and Industry" - Cluster "Climate, energy and mobility" | Ensuring the wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society; | | Rural development initiative |
| 5 | Use the potentials of digitalisation in the provision of Services of general interest SGI | Based on accompi- shed the ASP-projects Pioneer, Access and Inter | | Intervention fields 011, 013, 052, 054, 095, 111, 112, 121, 122, 123, 124 | | | | |
| 6 | Establish a political dialogue on crossborder mobility | ... | ... | Intervention fields 133 | ... | | | |
| 7 | Implement new models of crossborder commuting in various areas | | | Intervention fields 059, 062, 063, 066, 069, 070, 075, 076, 087, 104 | | | | |
| 8 | Smart SME's: transferring knowledge on the potentials of digitalisation from research to very small SME's in peripheral areas | | | Intervention fields 057, 058, 070, 076, 021, 103, 108, 109 | | Ensuring the wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society; | | |
| 9 | Digital 3D landscape model of the entire Alpine region | Project submitted to the 4th ASP call | Contribution to the following Interreg-specific objectives as outlined in Art. 14 of COM(2018) 374 4.a) enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders, 4.b) under component 1, 2 and 3 Interreg programmes enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies | Intervention fields 011, 035, 036, 057, 084, 133 | Pillar II: Cluster "Inclusive and secure society" | | | |

9 Outlook

In the next period starting from January 2020, AG5 will mainly focus on finishing the ongoing strategic initiatives and capitalising on these and the already completed initiatives. Capitalising

means the transfer of knowledge from these initiatives to territories, which have not yet been involved in the activities and bringing the findings to a higher political level.

One strategic initiative is still pending. AG5 intended to develop a 3D digital landscape model of the Alps. This idea was initially brought forward by the then Bavarian presidency in 2017. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find any funding for this idea until now. Investigations are still going on. If successful, this initiative will be implemented in the period after 2020.