

## ACTION GROUP 5



*To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services*

# Alpine Think Tank on Services of general interest

## Thesis paper

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



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## 1 Aims and background of the thesis paper

The Alpine Think Tank is a platform for the exchange of experiences aiming at providing strategic reflections on service of general interests (SGI) across the Alps. It identifies upcoming challenges for SGI in the Alps; it searches for innovative (transnational) solutions; it discusses about policy recommendations; it reflects the work of projects or initiatives in the field of SGI; finally it proposes solutions on a technical and political level.

The Alpine Think Tank covers diverse thematic fields of SGI but focusses mainly on: mobility, digital accessibility, postal services, energy supply, education, health care, social care and basic goods of daily needs. The geographic focus lies on the EUSALP area and here within more specifically on sparsely populated mountain and rural areas as they face bigger challenges in upkeeping their SGI's.

The Alpine Think Tank was built up in the framework of the INTESI project (Interreg Alpine Space Program) and is actually acting as a Subgroup 2 of the Action Group 5 of the EUSALP. The Think Tank started working in 2016 and has since held two times a year a meeting. It is composed of various representatives, ranging from public authorities at different levels, service providers consumers to researchers. The full list of the members of the Think Tank can be consulted at <https://servicepublic.ch/en/alpine-think-tank/think-tank-members/>.

This Thesis paper represents an intermediate state of the discussion within the Think Tank and provide food for thought for the next EU-programming period and the upcoming work within EUSALP with the expected AlpGov II project.

## 2 Starting point

The Thesis paper is based on the following considerations and assumptions:

1. SGI of high quality are a necessary precondition for citizen's well-being and for a prosperous economy. This holds particularly true for rural and mountain areas, which are more exposed to decrease in SGI due to various challenges like demographic change (e.g. aging, brain-drain) or structural changes in the economy, etc.

2. SGI types and quality differ very much according to different urban and rural typologies (urban areas, regional centers, tourism centers, rural areas, peripheral areas) within the Alpine area.
3. The legal framework for SGI mainly follows a sectoral approach. It is set by European, national, regional and municipal legislations, which can vary from country to country. It can encourage but also hinder the development and the efficient functioning of SGI.
4. The competencies for the different fields of SGI are located at various hierarchical levels, which makes a coordination across sectors more and more difficult.
5. Administrative borders at all levels act as barriers for the integrated development of SGI.
6. SGI are evolutive by nature. They have to adapt to the needs of the consumers, to technical and organizational opportunities, to the legal framework etc.

A collection of the strategies and policies governing the provision of SGI in the EUSALP-perimeter can be found at <https://servicepublic.ch/en/database-of-existing-strategies-on-sgi/>

### 3 Thesis for the future of SGI in the alpine area

In order to improve the delivery and ensure high quality of SGI in the Alpine area, the members of the Think Tank have identified the following points:

1. The sectoral approach to SGI needs to be overcome through an integrated territorial approach. The approach should consider people's needs in a given territory, the territorial dimension, and the benefits of the synergies that can arise by combining different SGI sectors.
2. The integrated territorial approach must look at the future demand of SGI. Therefore, projections on the needs of the consumers and of the evolution of the demographic structure must be taken in consideration.
3. An integrated development of SGI needs a multilevel governance approach due to the fact that the competencies lie at various institutional levels. The Macroregional strategy for the alpine area EUSALP therefore constitutes an ideal framework to deal with such aspects.

4. The territorial integration of SGI requires a strategic approach at the appropriate institutional level. This level will in most cases be an inter-municipal level, as the municipal level is often too small to take benefit of synergies across services.
5. Spatial development is one important approach to an integrated territorial delivery of SGI. The delivery of SGI must be integrated into spatial planning instruments, also at cross border-level. Where appropriate cross border spatial planning instruments are missing, they need to be developed. SGI must be taken into consideration when developing the settlement systems.
6. Digitalisation can help to develop new services and to improve the delivery of existing services. The digitalisation process needs also efforts for capacity building, local skills and social innovation, including the opportunities of ICT.
7. The exchange of good practises across the alpine area is very fruitful and must be encouraged. The Think Tank can structure this discussion and make use of its own website and of the Platform of knowledge of EUSALP to present these good practises.
8. New organisational approaches including social innovative practices and initiatives for the delivery of SGI must be tested and developed.
9. The delivery of SGI can be made by private or public providers. What is important, is a high standard of delivery of the services. Public-private partnerships need to be improved. A system needs to be developed that facilitates cooperation and volunteering. Now there are still too many laws and regulation that hinder cooperation models.
10. The cooperation amongst different types of actors, including civil society members, for the delivery of SGI in the Alpine area must be encouraged. Cross-sectoral cooperation need to be reinforced.
11. A harmonization of the different legal prescriptions amongst the countries, regions and municipalities in the alpine area is not feasible due to the different political, institutional and cultural background in each country. But a process of mutual learning and exchange of experiences on legislation can be inspiring. Ideas must then be integrated into and adapted to the corresponding legal framework. The legal framework must be conceived in a way to allow experiments.
12. The fact, that national and regional legislations and regulations can differ to a great extent, makes cross border services sometimes very difficult, for example for education services. Cross border services (across national but also regional and municipal borders) therefore needs special attention. They can to a great extend hep to build a common understanding

of the macroregional strategy for the Alpine area EUSALP. Flexibility rules must be implemented to easily allow the rollout of cross border services. Common, cross border planning instruments (cross border spatial plans) and financial schemes need to be developed. Financial instruments like Interreg are important to deliver seed money for a starting point, but sustainable financial schemes must be developed.

13. Regulations must be formulated in a way not to hinder but to encourage the improvement of existing services or the delivery of new services.
14. Regulation authorities must be in charge to control the implementation of the SGI-prescriptions and should in the future also impose a cross-sectoral and integrated, territorial approach for the delivery of SGI.
15. Cohesion policy and sectoral policies like the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) and their implementation must be conceived in a way in order to help the development of new approaches to SGI and to upkeep a high standard over the whole territory.
16. Availability and ownership of the data: data concerning the delivery of SGI must be made available as open data. This holds particularly true for certain services like transport services and for special areas like cross border areas. The Platform of knowledge of EUSALP could become a common repository for the access to such data and provide the links to the relevant data providers. These data should be harmonized on an European level.
17. A permanent political dialogue on the delivery of SGI in the EUSALP-perimeter must be installed. The integration of this thesis paper into the declaration of the EUSALP-presidency would be a starting point.

#### 4 Good examples of service delivery

Some good examples may serve to illustrate the key messages of this Thesis paper. The examples are also presented on the website of the Think Tank at <https://servicepublic.ch/en/good-practice-examples/>

- Breitbandatlas - Guideline and Information about optical fibre opening up
- Broadband strategy South Tirol - Digitalisation as requirement for basic services
- Bus alpin - Association for public transport development for touristic destinations in the Swiss alpine areas
- Digitale Dörfer - Digitalisation for rural areas

- Freiamt bringt's - Delivery service for daily needs, local internet platform and target group oriented marketing, AlpineSpace ACCESS pilot activity ([presentation](#), MidTerm Conference)
- Gesundheitsregion Unterengadin - Product innovation in health tourism
- Integrated approach on services of general interests - Experience from Germany, presentation Prof. Dr. Peter Dehne
- mia Engiadina - Mobile working space in the Engadin
- Parc shuttle service - Soft mobility in the nature park Weißensee, AlpineSpace ACCESS pilot activity
- RW Oberwallis - Solidarity in fibre optic rollout in Switzerland
- Schéma de services (Rhône-Alpes) - Considering civil society and their needs for the construction and organisation of services of general interests ([presentation](#), Adrien Devos)
- Service of general interest - Requirement for an integrated regional approach, presentation Thomas Egger
- Tyrolian SGI Strategies - Broadband expansion, Healthcare, Mobile Care and ICT pilot action, presentation of Manfred Riedl and Barbara Frick
- Videoservices - Videoservices in Pays Horloger and Haut Jura, AlpineSpace ACCESS pilot activity ([more informations](#))
- Maison de services au public: [https://smartvillages.informatika.uni-mb.si/good\\_practice/digital-support-for-administrative-purpose/](https://smartvillages.informatika.uni-mb.si/good_practice/digital-support-for-administrative-purpose/)
- E.U.M. cooperative in Moos, South Tyrol – integration of services of different sectors (basic goods, telecommunication, energy supply) in one multipurpose cooperative
- TILO (<http://www.tilo.ch/en/>) – provision of the cross border local rail service between Lombardy and Switzerland (Ticino) by a joint venture between the Swiss SBB and the Lombardian TRENORD rail companies since 2004. TRENORD is owned by the Regional Government and Trenitalia; SBB is the Swiss national rail company owned by the Government. The ownership and governance of TILO is on a peer basis.
- MAAS (= Mobility As A Service) – establishment of market providers of transportation on an integrated and multimodal basis, possibly supported by public subsidies (for more details: <https://www.its-finland.fi/index.php/en/palvelut/mobility-as-a-service.html>, the article “MaaS in rural areas - case Finland” published by Research in Transportation Business & Management, Elsevier, 2018, and the presentation “Future challenges for SGI in the Alps – Transport” held by F. Stanta during the Think Tank meeting in Lanslebourg, June 2017).
- Healthcare project salute-zdravstvo. <https://euro-go.eu/sl/programmi-e-progetti/progetti-iti-salute-zdravstvo/>
- Zeleni zaboječek – online shop by Čarna Ltd. with ecologically produced fruits and vegetables in Ljubljana, Slovenia
- „AMICO WEB“ („WEB FRIEND“) – e-services in mountain areas, virtual shop and assistance for the elderly, Qualima AlpineSpace project pilot activity in Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Italy
- FAMA cooperative – retail on rural areas by FAMA Ltd. in Primorska region of Slovenia

- Multi-purpose centers – offering multiple SGIs in one place/building, QUALIMA AlpineSpace pilot activity in Veneto, Italy
- Improvement of small retailer network – management of shops in mountain areas, ACCESS AlpineSpace project pilot activity in Liguria Region, Italy
- Consolidation of small food shops – local agenda, market research and advising, ACCESS AlpineSpace project pilot activity in Tirol, Austria
- Catalogue of local food providers – boosting demand for local food, DEMOCHANGE Alpine Space project pilot activity in Škofja Loka Hills, Slovenia

## 5 The way ahead

This Thesis paper constitutes the intermediate findings of the Alpine Think Tank on SGI. It was submitted in 2019 to the then Italian presidency of EUSALP. The aim is to integrate the reflections of the Thesis paper into the work of EUSALP. The Thesis paper is made available to European, national and regional authorities within the EUSALP areas.

The Thesis paper is published on the website of the Think Tank and also distributed through the channels of AG5 and the members of the Think Tank.

The Think Tank will continue its work in the coming years and go further into detail of the points elaborated in chapter 3.

Bern, 22 August 2019 (rev. May 2020)

PS: for further readings and documents, please go to <https://servicepublic.ch/en/interesting-documents/>