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Quality of life among young people in the Alps: Identifying life quality indicators

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Abstract

Measuring quality of life encompasses various dimensions, including individual perceptions and societal values. The Erasmus+ project Alpine Compass focuses on the quality of life for young people in the Alps, comparing their needs and challenges in France, Germany, Liechtenstein, and Slovenia through studies and interviews. This article combines literature analysis with interview opinions to identify new indicators for measuring quality of life. Quality of life is multifaceted, involving material conditions and subjective perceptions. Key results include the importance of a healthy environment, sustainable mobility, cultural offerings, mental health, and the impact of climate change on the future.

Keywords: quality of life, youth, life in the Alps, alpine regions, indicators

Izveček

Kakovost življenja mladih v Alpah: Opredelitev kazalnikov kakovosti življenja

Merjenje kakovosti življenja zajema različne razsežnosti, vključno s posameznikovimi zaznavami in družbenimi vrednotami. Projekt Erasmus+ Alpski kompas se osredotoča na kakovost življenja mladih v Alpah in s pomočjo študij in intervjujev primerja njihove potrebe in izzive v Franciji, Nemčiji, Lihtenštajnu in Sloveniji. Ta članek združuje analizo literature z mnenji iz intervjujev, da bi opredelil nove kazalnike kakovosti življenja. Kakovost življenja je večplastna in vključuje materialne pogoje in subjektivne zaznave. Ključni rezultati vključujejo pomen zdravega okolja, trajnostne mobilnosti, kulturne ponudbe, duševnega zdravja in vpliva podnebnih sprememb na prihodnost.

Ključne besede: kakovost življenja, mladi, življenje v Alpah, alpske regije, kazalniki



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1 Introduction

Ever since it was signed in 1991, the Alpine Convention has attached great importance to the population and culture of the Alps, setting itself the objective of "ensuring respect for, and the maintenance and promotion of, the cultural and social identity of the population living in the Alps (Alpine Convention, n.d.)". When it comes to quality of life in the Alps, it is particularly interesting to note that the Alpine Convention, from the beginning, proposed a broad definition of quality of life that included much wider objectives than economic development or the improvement of material living conditions and the environment. For example, it also included social wellbeing of Alpine inhabitants and people's personal perceptions and the cultural and value systems of a society.

Today, it is accepted that measuring quality of life involves taking an interest in several dimensions of people's situation: their state of health, level of education, degree of social integration, working conditions and levels of physical and economic security are also considered. The concept of quality of life also includes the personal perceptions of individuals and the culture and value structures of a society.

With this in mind, the Erasmus+ project Alpine Comp ass: Youth for quality of life in the Alps (2023-2024) aims at working on quality of life of young people in the Alps. The project compares the situation of young people in France, Germany, Liechtenstein and Slovenia based on existing research with young people living in the Alps.

The objective of this research is to improve the understanding of the needs and challenges faced by young people in the Alps. By young people, we include people in the age group between 16 to 30 years old. It also aims to compare what has already been written (literature analysis) and what young people think nowadays (interviews) to add contemporary concerns to the former studies if new indicators for a good quality of life emerge. Moreover, comparing young people's interview results from different nationalities gives a transnational perspective on quality of life, showing the necessity of a European alpine cooperation about that cross-border subject.

This information could give decision makers arguments for their political work, by helping them understand how to improve young people's life in the Alps, and thus life in the Alps in general. The goal is also to encourage them to consider young people's opinions and needs, as the latter represent the future of the Alps and are the one that are going to face all the upcoming economical, ecological and social challenges.

2 Methodology

This research paper has been conducted on the basis of existing studies, compared with interviews of young people living in the Alpine part of the four following countries: Liechtenstein, France, Germany and Slovenia.

For each country, a synthesis of the main literature findings about quality of life in the Alpine part of the country and/or among young people has been written, explaining which indicators they used for addressing quality of life.

Furthermore, interviews were conducted among fifteen young people from these countries. Four young people from Germany and France, five young people from Slovenia and two young people from Liechtenstein were interviewed, throughout 2023.

In each country, the purpose was to find a group of interviewees as diverse as possible, in terms of age, living environment, professional orientation and lifestyle, education, etc. to get a broad perspective.

We selected young people in predeterminate age group between 16 to 30 years old and living in different areas (cities/towns/villages). Nine of the selected interviewees were female, and five of the selected interviewees were male.

The interviews were conducted live (face to face) using a questionnaire we had prepared in advance. Interview was about 40 to 60 minutes long.

The questions were designed based on the learnings from ESPON methodology and findings from literature. Questions were formulated by lead partner of the project CIPRA Slovenija. Then, the final questions and indicators were reviewed by experts on quality of life and conducting interviews (ZRC SAZU Anton Melik Geographical Institute).

Questionnaire had three parts. First part had 12 questions which interviewees filled in alone (such as: questions about their age, location of living, net monthly income, level of education, current housing situation, living distance to different services ...). Second part had a table with different indicators and for each indicator you could chose how important (from 1-10) is this indicator for you and how accessible, considering the distance or economic accessibility, are the following indicators for you in the area you live (for example: owning a car, access to internet, healthy soil ...). Third part had 10 questions related to values, needs, wishes of places where they live (for example: what is quality of life for you, do you feel that you have enough free time ...). The purpose was to understand the perception of youth regarding quality of life in the Alps, to then compare it to the existing literature and finally to raise youth voices and make their opinions more considered by alpine politics (Erasmus+ project Alpine Compass: youth for the quality of life in the Alps, 2024).

3 Results

3.1 Literature review from France

In France, the indicators to define quality of life are based on the studies of the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE). Before 2009, quality of life was mostly based on economic criteria such as the GDP (gross domestic product). Since 2009 and the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi commission report (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009) ordered by the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, more holistic indicators have been considered to rate quality of life in France. Thus, this notion is defined on the one hand by individual material criteria such as the salary, the working conditions, the accommodation, health conditions etc (Jakoubovitch and Lavergne, 2016). On the other hand, quality of life is also rated according to the subjective perception of well-being of everyone (Durieux and Méreau, 2023). This well-being is based on indicator linked to the environment offered by the territory people live in (access to services, housing conditions, access to nature ...) but also based on the perception of the individual living condition (physical and economic insecurities, trust in the government, quality and frequency of social ties, stress, anxiety ...) (Grosinger and Gentiane, 2023). So many indicators in a wide range of both objective and subjective dimensions show the complexity of properly rating quality of life (Jakoubovitch and Lavergne, 2016). This was a general definition made to discuss

quality of life in the whole territory of France. However, our study focuses on young people in the Alpine region.

The INSEE made study in the two France's Alpine regions. One has been carried out in southern part of France in region Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur (Durieux and Méreau, 2023) and another in the southeast-central part of France in region Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (Jakoubovitch and Lavergne, 2016).

The Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur region benefits from many advantages such as the low air pollution and unspoiled natural environment, provides a pleasant living environment and encourages the practice of sports.

The Alpine part of the Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur region seems to be divided into two different territories when it comes to quality of life. First, the area with a lot of ski resorts. In this area, the employment rate is very high, and the unemployment rate is twice lower than the regional average. However, employment is mostly linked to tourism and is more precarious and seasonal and pays less than the regional average (29,133 € per year).

On the other hand, the other area formed by the Champsaur Valgaudemar and Guilmestrais-Queyras (both federations of municipalities), more isolated and with few ski resorts, shows a lower quality of life. The inhabitants are usually older, with a lower income. For the young people living there, quality of life is lower than in the rest of the Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur region because the unemployment rate is higher for them, they live quite far from their work and have the highest commuting time to access services in the region. In the whole Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur region, the young people's unemployment rate is higher than the French average.

Thus, precarious employment, unemployment and long commuting time to services are the indicators that lower the most quality of life of the inhabitants, especially young people, in this region.

The INSEE survey about the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region (Jakoubovitch and Lavergne, 2016) showed that the areas comprising municipalities in and around the Alps are characterised by a low average level of urbanisation and relatively poor access to services. With the presence of ski resorts in these areas, most of the jobs are in tourism. The result is a favourable employment situation, with most residents working close to home. However, the proportion of fixed-term contracts (CDD) in salaried employment is higher than in other areas, due to the often-seasonal nature of the activity.

Therefore, according to the INSEE survey, quality of life in the Alpine part of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region is improved by the direct access to nature and outdoor activities, the high rate of employment and the short distance between home and work. On the other hand, what makes the quality of life lower in this Alpine area is mainly the distance to reach services.

Nevertheless, none of these studies is focused on young people. It also focuses more on the material and objective indicators such as salary, accommodation and access to services rather than subjective ones like anxiety, trust in the government, etc. There are indeed very few studies about the quality of life of young people in the French Alps. However, indicators such as the unemployment rate among young

people, the cost of housing, and transport statistics can provide an insight into the challenges they face. Then we can see that literature about quality of life in the French Alps lacks surveys focused on young people and more subjective indicators.

3.2 Literature review from Germany

Quality of life in Germany is a multifaceted concept with diverse definitions. According to the Federal Center for Health Education, it involves both objective and subjective elements, shaped by the interplay of various factors (Noll, 2022). The Federal Agency for Civic Education emphasises its comprehensive nature beyond material prosperity. The German Federal Government (Presse und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 2016) defines it as a concept striving for economic, social, and ecological goals, focusing on better quality, fair distribution, and improved living conditions.

To provide a comprehensive report on the study situation in Germany on the topic of "Quality of life of young people in the Alpine region", we first researched current studies. It was noticeable that there is not one all-encompassing study that takes all aspects into account. On the contrary, young people between the ages of 18 and 29 were generally often left out of studies; in particular, studies on the topic of "good life" (gutes Leben) focused more on children and teenagers, on pensioners or on society in general. Nevertheless, there are also some studies in Germany that deal specifically with the quality of life of young people. Three of these studies will be presented in more detail below, which have examined quality of life from the following perspectives: rural areas, the effects of the lockdown period and current crises, and attitudes and behaviours. It is also important to note that, as far as the research on which the report is based is concerned, there are hardly any studies about quality of life in the German Alpine region, especially not regarding people between the ages of 18 and 29.

The Shell Youth Studies (Albert et. al., 2019) are conducted with young people aged 12 to 25 in Germany every four years since 1953 and aim to provide a comprehensive insight into the life situation, attitudes, and behaviours of young people. The 18th Shell Youth Study, published in October 2019, analyses the living conditions of young people from a political and social perspective. This current study not only looks at young people today but also provides impetus for socio-political thinking. In addition to political and economic factors, family, friendship, and school influences played a decisive role. The young people showed increased political interest, expressed their concerns clearly and were generally satisfied with their lives. Despite a general satisfaction with democracy, many young people expressed dissatisfaction with politicians. Family, friends, and partnerships were very important to them, as were environmental awareness and a high standard of living. The young people were optimistic about their personal and social future but had an awareness of social grievances. They demanded change to actively participate in shaping their future (Albert et. al., 2019).

The "Youth in Germany" study (18th Shell youth study, 2019) shows that young people are suffering more than other age groups from the effects of current crises such as the coronavirus pandemic, climate crisis, wars, and inflation. A permanent crisis mode has led to financial hardship and psychological stress for the young age group which are mostly in school or other forms of education and training. Almost half of 14 to 29-year-olds in Germany experience stress compared to only a fifth of 50 to 69-year-olds. The authors of the study, researchers in the field of youth Simon

Schnetzer, Klaus Hurrelmann and political scientist Kilian Hampel, attribute the high level of psychological stress among the younger generation to high personal expectations of the future (Schnetzer et. al., 2023). It is interesting to note that the SINUS survey (2022), which is explained in more detail in the next section, primarily observes other factors such as the climate crisis as a cause of psychological stress. With all the findings of the study, the authors emphasise the need for a rapid expansion of mental health support services to counteract a possible consolidation of depression, addictive behaviour and isolation among particularly stressed young people (Schnetzer et al., 2023).

Following on from the study, we will now turn to the previously mentioned SINUS survey (2022), which provides results on attitudes towards climate change among teenagers. It can be assumed that the findings regarding the impact of the climate crisis on the quality of life of 14- to 17-year-olds can also be applied to the here discussed age group of 18- to 29-year-olds. The survey results show that fear of the effects of climate change is widespread among young people, with 64% expressing great or moderate fear of the effects of climate change on their future. The survey also highlights fears of specific consequences such as extreme weather events, loss of habitat and possible wars over water. This anxiety can have a significant impact on young people's quality of life, including stress and depression. The emotional burden can lead to feelings of powerlessness, sadness and despair, limiting future choices and affecting social interactions. However, there are also positive aspects, as climate anxiety can lead to an increased commitment to environmental protection (SINUS Institut, 2022).

The research project "Stadt. Land. Wo? What drives young people" (Schäfer et. al., 2020) by the Katholische Landjugendbewegung Bayern (KLJB) is dedicated to the challenges in rural areas of Bavaria and examines the reasons for young people leaving the countryside. The young generation moves from the countryside to the city and often stays there, which has negative consequences for their communities of origin and the quality of life of young people there. Against this background, the KLJB study examined the reasons why young people leave rural regions in Bavaria, but also why they stay there or return. The study, conducted in various regions of Bavaria (alpine and non-alpine), emphasises the positive attitude of young people towards rural areas, despite challenges such as demographic and social structural change. The strong spatial identity, characterized by family ties and social connections, significantly influences the decision to stay in rural areas. Despite general satisfaction, there are infrastructural deficiencies in the area of needs-based housing, and political influence is criticised. The study emphasises the importance of value-based life planning and calls for comprehensive social support, especially from local authorities. The study concludes that youth policy should be seen as a fundamental issue and targeted measures should promote the willingness to stay and return. To limit migration from rural regions, the study emphasises the need for security (Schäfer et. al., 2020).

The study situation, shown exemplary by the presented three studies paints a clear picture of the situation and needs of the younger generations in Germany and especially the rural parts of Germany. Young people in Germany are suffering more from the effects of current crises than older age groups and are therefore more often under psychological stress. In addition, the situation of young people in rural areas reveals shortcomings in terms of infrastructure and political participation (Albert et. al., 2019; Schäfer et. al., 2020; Schnetzer et. al., 2023; SINUS Institut, 2022). In

general, young people are demanding a greater influence in shaping their own future. Even though there are no specified studies for the Alpine Region of Germany yet, they are part of the study group in all studies and therefore the results also represent the situation of youth in the German Alpine region. It can moreover be assumed that the situation of young people aged 18 to 29 in the German Alpine region is even more critical than shown in the cross-regional studies, as the infrastructural problems of rural areas are exacerbated here by the geography.

3.3 Literature review from Slovenia

When reviewing the literature on quality of life we found out that researchers have tended to focus on aspects, short periods or the population, using a variety of indicators. Consequently, it has become apparent that there has been no conducted longitudinal study on the quality of young people in Slovenia.

Quality of life is influenced by several factors, ranging from material circumstances, career, health, education, leisure, economic and physical security, natural and living environment (Nared, 2022). First and foremost, it is about different perceptions of the circumstances of an individual's life. For example, someone living in a village may miss certain infrastructure – transport links, cultural institutions or shops and consequently consider their quality of life to be lower than that of an individual living in a city. On the other hand, the latter may have all the infrastructure but miss the unspoiled nature of their environment or be disturbed by noise.

According to Eurostat (2022), Slovenians are above the European average in key indicators on housing, working conditions, leisure, social relations, safety and health, with material living conditions or finances being the only two indicators that score lower. The survey conducted by Juvan Pobljšaj (2019) used objective indicators – the material conditions of the population, accessibility of services and goods, and the poverty rate – showed that the subjective assessment of the quality of life of Slovenians is on average satisfactory. The survey by Bučinel et al. (2022), which included young people, focused on the quality of living, housing and jobs. Housing was identified as the most important issue, followed by social life, interpersonal relations and social integration. A more detailed analysis showed differences between those living in rural and urban areas, between school and university students and those in employment, and between those with a housing problem and those without a housing problem. Research in Slovenia on quality of life has also included the elderly in home environment (Mežan, 2021), the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities (Valentič Ponikvar, 2013; Zahirović, 2015) and the impact of physical activity as an important factor on the quality of life of young people (Valenčič, 2020). Vrabič Kek (2012) in the research called *Kakovost življenja* (Quality of Life) mentions key dimensions of quality of life such as material conditions (income, consumption, wealth), health, education, personal activities and work, governance, social ties, environment and security (economic and personal). People's perception of the world, the environment in which they live, and social development are also becoming increasingly important as a measure of quality of life. Nared (2022) has designed a quality-of-life model as a more holistic alternative to the current way of measuring the development of areas, which is based mainly on economic aspects of development. In the area of material conditions, all of Slovenia is above European average, in the area of self-esteem, social and environmental inclusion, including ecosystem services and biodiversity, western Slovenia is slightly above average from a European perspective, and in the area of personal and socio-economic wellbeing,

Slovenia is below the European average. The division between western Slovenia, with a higher territorial quality of life, and eastern Slovenia, with a lower territorial quality of life, has been confirmed for some time.

3.4 Results from the interviews in France

In the interview, the participants (young people living in the French Alpine region) were asked what they thought constituted a good quality of life and what values and factors play a part in it.

The environment they live in is the key factor for a good quality of life according to the majority of French young people interviewed. For three participants, an easy access to nature is important in their everyday life. Two people underlined the importance of low pollution.

Various other factors contributing to a good quality of life were mentioned by individual participants. One of them added the necessity to have meeting places like bars in order to create friendliness. This will is linked to one of the values they enhanced the most during the interviews: the need for social bonds.

Someone explained that the cultural facilities as well as the presence of schools were important.

Additionally, two participants highlighted the importance of employment in quality of life. One said that a wide range of job offers is necessary but sometimes hard to reach in the mountain areas. The other one explained that employment can lower quality of life if the job takes too much room and doesn't allow the person to have enough time for personal life.

"A bad quality of life: when work gets the upper hand over everyday life, leisure time and friends (job too intense)."

The topic of easy mobility has also been mentioned by one participant, specified by straight journeys, public transports running at regular hours and with many links. Access to primary needs (accommodation, food ...) and the need for free time alone are also criteria that have been mentioned one time during the interviews.

One person summarised quality of life the following way: "It means living well in that place, feeling good both physically and emotionally".

Aspects of the own surroundings

We also questioned the participants about the type and location of their housings, as well as their opinion on the quality of their environment.

Regarding housing, the results of the interviews show that the type and location are usually a mix between choice and necessity. One person said she chose to share a flat, for a lower rent and for friendliness. One person lives at her parents' house because she's studying next to where they live. Two people explained they chose to live in the city centre. Two people chose they studies according to their will to live in the mountain area: "It's a choice! Because I like the mountains and that's why I chose to live and study there (just like my parents did)."

All the participants agreed to say that the location of their housing suits their needs and values, especially for the balance it offers between an easy access to the mountain and the benefits of the city (culture and meeting places).

Nevertheless, they have mixed opinions regarding the quality of their environment. The city of Grenoble had been quoted by four participants who underlined its high pollution rate and the heavy heat in summer. One other said that his mountain valley is too urbanised and contaminated, especially during the touristic period because of all the traffic jams. On the other hand, two people like the fact that their natural surroundings allow them to escape from the city fast and easily.

Aspects considering the local community and amenities

Another approach to the topic of quality of life was linked to how they feel in their local communities. To the question of whether or not the participants felt like they could truly express themselves and be who they are without judgement, they all answered yes, in big cities as well as in smaller towns. However, one individual explained that in his region it is “all or nothing”, which means that when you don’t think like the majority you should keep it for yourself.

Regarding the way to be more supported and connected to their communities, two people talked about the need for more public transports leading to the surroundings, especially to reach the mountain area. One said he should get more involved in local associations. Another would like his local community to ask more for the inhabitants’ opinions.

What could be improved is for three of them a better access to the mountain through more public transport but also through more outdoor activities offered at school. For one person living in a small town between a big city and a ski resort, public transports are also very much needed as after a certain hour early at night, there is no way to get to these places without a car.

In the big cities, one of the things that could be improved for two people is the pollution rate and the heat: they would like more solutions to cool down the city in summer. One person would like the quay to be car-free and another one would like the cycle paths to be improved and safer.

Here, the topic that is the most important is therefore mobility both in and out of the city to reach the mountain area.

Finally, when we ask the participants what factors are going to have the biggest impact on their life in the next decade, two main answers are highlighted. First, three people underlined the impacts of climate change on their future, having for instance an impact on winter outdoor activities. One person linked it to politics, saying: “Climate change and the political decisions taken to block its consequences, so the political factor is going to have the biggest influence on my future”.

The second most stressed topic is employment. Two individuals explained that their job is going to dictate if they are happy according to their work-life balance, where their job is located and how well they feel doing their job.

In conclusion, even though young French people's opinions on what good quality of life is diverse, a few recurrent elements were underlined by all interviews. Environment and employment are key factors for a good quality of life according to young French people.

Environment in the city can be improved especially through a lower pollution rate. What they like about their environment in the Alps is the easy access to nature, close to their city.

The topic of better public transport is also very significant for them. More efficient and regular connections between the city and the rural mountain areas are currently lacking and could greatly enhance their quality of life.

Bonding and social interactions are a main need for youth in the Alps. They want to be supported and be able to meet people, as well as being supported and consulted by their communities.

Employment is important as it defines the place, they are going to live in for many of them, which has a big impact on their quality of life. The job itself is also an essential criterion for young people, and that's why they think a good work-life balance is necessary. Employment is for that matter one of the main topics that is going to impact their life in the future, with climate change. A part of the impact comes from the political answer to climate change.

3.5 Results from the interviews in Germany

In the interview, the participants were asked what they thought constituted a good quality of life and what values and factors play a part in it.

For three participants, a crucial factor for a good quality of life is their living environment, encompassing aspects such as proximity to nature and easy access to leisure activities. Another significant aspect for three individuals is their personal way of life, emphasizing the ability to shape their lives according to their preferences, including maintaining a balanced work-life dynamic and the freedom for personal development. "Mix of work-life balance and personal development."

Various other factors contributing to a good quality of life were mentioned by individual participants. These include the importance of family and friends, affordable housing, and the quality of drinking water. In terms of values associated with quality of life, all participants emphasize the significance of interpersonal relations, expressing that strong relationships within their social circles are vital. "I believe there is a narrower circle and an outer circle [...] the narrower circle would be like care, affection, family, friendship, respect for each other".

Additionally, two participants highlight the impact of societal factors, such as living in an open, progressive, and democratic society that values equality. "The outer circle would be something like democracy, human dignity, and all these things that one can't easily influence so directly".

Individual values mentioned include the ability to express oneself, freedom, and the availability of leisure time.

Aspects of the own surroundings

The reasons for the location and type of housing vary among participants. For three individuals, the location is a matter of choice, driven by a desire to live in the mountains. However, the specific location is determined by necessity, as it is tied to job opportunities and offerings. "Both, but I chose to live in the mountains, so it's optional. But the specific place of residence is then again due to the job."

Two participants mention residing in a shared flat because they enjoy the experience of living with others. Regarding whether the location aligns with their wishes, needs, values, and priorities, three participants indicate that the situation only partially fulfils their needs. While nature is generally viewed as a positive factor, the lack of certain amenities found in larger cities, such as nightclubs, is seen as a drawback. "Conditionally, so in any case it fulfils my wishes, I wanted to go to the mountains and from there it's great. But of course, the village location is somewhat different than the big city."

Only one person expresses satisfaction with their current situation. When asked about the quality of their natural environment, all four participants affirm that it is good. One participant notes that, while their environment is suitable for a big city, there is still too much traffic and insufficient natural spaces. Three participants highlight the accessibility of nature in their surroundings, including mountains, forests, and lakes. "I think the best quality I have at my place of residence is nature, and for me that is a very big point for my quality of life. And here nature is just very quickly accessible"

Aspects considering the local community and amenities

Participants' experiences regarding self-expression vary based on their location. One individual, residing in a big city, feels they can express themselves without judgement. However, two participants in smaller towns find it challenging, with one noting the need for adaptation in a small village: "No, not a 100%, because it is a small village, and I have the feeling that one has to adapt to a certain extent."

And the other expressing difficulty in avoiding judgement despite being able to express themselves. Responses to feeling more connected and supported by the local community differ. Two participants do not feel the need for increased connection, while one believes openness to the surrounding society is essential. Another participant would feel more connected with a higher cultural offer for young people. "Maybe a little bit more cultural offerings for young people. Connecting of young people outside their own bubble."

Participants also share perspectives on what could be improved in their town/city/village. Three emphasise the need for changes in infrastructure, including reducing traffic, improving public transport, and enhancing opportunities comparable to those in cities (cafés, shopping, etc.). "There could be more economic diversity. For example, we don't have any cozy cafés where you can sit inside."

Another participant expresses a desire for more cultural offerings tailored to the local community rather than primarily for tourists.

The participants foresee several factors influencing their quality of life in the next decade. Three individuals highlight the significance of their jobs, emphasizing factors

such as a good salary, work-life balance, and job satisfaction. Additionally, two participants express concerns about the impact of climate change: "I believe for me personally climate change. Both professionally and privately." and its associated social effects on their lives in the future. Other factors mentioned include the importance of interpersonal relations, travel, and the influence of politics on their quality of life.

3.6 Results from the interviews in Slovenia

Most respondents emphasise access to services and living in an environment surrounded by nature when defining quality of life. They also highlight the opportunity to develop a career, the presence of an active local community and access to major cities, with an emphasis on public transport. "Quality of life is about having a choice between different options and not being constrained by them."

Values associated with quality of life are nature, freedom and autonomy, access to services, access to quality food and a safe environment that is not threatened by natural disasters. Family and cultural values, good relationships and belonging to a community, and support for young people are also of a big importance. "Peace, nature, respect, good neighbourhood relations."

Quality of life for individuals means living without restrictions, a good ratio between services and the natural environment, and living up to modern standards with access to healthcare and recreational areas. "Quality of life for me is being able to do what you want and being happy with yourself."

Aspects of the own surroundings

When asked whether the location suits their wants, needs, values or priorities, one respondent mentioned that the location suited them perfectly, while others had mixed feelings. "There are also constraints in our local area related to the number of inhabitants. Certain activities are simply not worthwhile due to (too) low demand (e.g. fitness)."

One respondent mentioned that their current place of residence generally reflects their personal choice and preferences, but they also mentioned some factors that might influence them to move. "I would be forced to move if property prices continue to rise or if the city becomes too crowded with foreign capital".

They mention too much tourist pressure and the associated overcrowding, the invasion of foreign capital in relation to housing and financial constraints.

Aspects considering the local community and amenities

All respondents point to differences between urban and rural populations. The latter are more likely to be conservative thinkers, therefore respondents feel the inability to express themselves in their society. "It is difficult to define oneself ideologically without being judged."

There are also challenges of acceptance in the local environment in terms of generational differences and political orientation. "If you think differently, you stand out."

On the one hand, living in a village offers easy access to unspoilt nature, but on the other hand it has its drawbacks - lack of adequate services, poor accessibility to services and poor transport links.

To feel more involved and connected to the local community, respondents stress the importance of a variety of social, cultural and sporting events and joint projects where they can socialise and share experiences. "I miss activities such as evenings for young people, board games, choir, other activities ..."

Particular attention could also be paid to creating opportunities for intergenerational meetings and networking, as well as to creating more places where such associations could be organised. On the other hand, one of the respondents misses the municipality's greater commitment to such efforts. "We are already connected, but it could be improved by having some joint projects, to have the possibility to connect even better, to create the opportunity to spend time together, because now we mostly just meet in bars or on the street."

When asked about improvements in their environment, they point to activities and locations where young people could socialise and have fun. Better transport links and public transport (taxis and bike hire), a better attitude of the municipality towards the local population, accessibility of services and improvements in the health system are essential. "More opportunities for individual participation, more cultural events, more dedicated places in nature for relaxation, space for a workplace in, more measures to enable commuters to live a more sustainable life."

Respondents point to extreme weather events related to climate change as factors affecting the future of their quality of life. "On the other hand, extreme events such as strong winds, droughts, heat, storms are likely to increase in the coming years. There will probably be even less snow in winter ... All these phenomena will also have economic consequences."

Employment and housing affordability for young people, getting a job that is suitable for their education are also important issues. Young people are also concerned about the future because of increasing pressures from tourism and the resulting deterioration in the quality of the natural environment. "Career, family, pollution, immigration of foreigners - even more housing unaffordability and cultural challenges."

3.7 Results from the interviews in Liechtenstein

Both interviewees expressed a strong emphasis on the importance of a high quality of life, which encompasses feeling safe, expressing oneself freely, and having autonomy in decision-making. They prioritize access to education, healthcare, and the ability to live independently. Both individuals also appreciate the natural environment.

Looking ahead, both interviewees expressed concerns about their post-graduate prospects, emphasizing the importance of finding a job, achieving financial stability, and establishing a comfortable living situation.

They showed concerns about societal norms limiting personal expression and the desire for more diverse cultural experiences. Suggestions for improving community

engagement include reducing gossip, providing clearer information about available resources, and expanding educational and career opportunities, especially for youth.

Both interviewees highlighted the need for better transportation options, shopping facilities, and nightlife venues. Empowering young people through voting rights and broader representation in decision-making processes is seen as crucial for enhancing community dynamics for the future. They also acknowledged factors such as education, career choices, climate change, and political changes that could impact their quality of life.

4 Discussion

4.1 Comparison of literature findings

All the literature from the three studied countries expresses the diversity of indicators to be considered when it comes to rate quality of life. From material indicators to subjective perception of each individual, quality of life is truly a complex concept to define. In all studies, generally the same main indicators were found, but not necessarily with the same level of importance. For example, indicators found more particularly in the German literature are the importance of policies and political participation in the youth well-being and emotional burden and anxiety (especially due to climate change) present among German young people. Even though German literature focuses on youth, there's a lack of literature about the Alpine part of the country. This is something found in the French literature, showing that one of the major indicators influencing quality of life in the French Alps is the working condition and salary linked to it (long- or short-term contracts, commuting distance, access to a diversity of jobs ...). In comparison, the Slovenian literature put housing (access and quality) as the most important indicator, followed by social life. However, there are no studies which would only focus on the Alpine part of the country.

Whereas literature in France, Slovenia and Germany lack studies about youth in the Alpine regions, French literature does focus on the Alpine area, but not on young people. All of it shows a general lack of studies focusing both on the Alps and on young people, in each country but also on the Alps in general..

4.2 Comparison of interviews

The findings provide a detailed understanding of young people's perspectives on quality of life in the Alpine region, highlighting both shared values and regional nuances. While traditional studies, particularly in French literature, often focus on employment rates and salaries, young interviewees prioritize work-life balance, connectivity, and access to nature. Public transport that facilitates easy access to cities and mountain areas is a critical factor, reflecting a broader view of mobility beyond mere commuting times.

A notable divergence from traditional research is the increasing concern about climate change, which young people see as a key factor shaping their future quality of life. Social connections and community bonding are also emphasized, surpassing their representation in earlier studies. Across all countries, proximity to nature and low pollution levels remain central indicators of a good living environment.

When comparing interviews from different Alpine countries, young people show a strong consensus on key priorities. These include access to nature, robust public transport networks, and strong interpersonal relationships. Suggested improvements focus on greener urban spaces, better transport links to remote areas, and increased cultural and social activities. However, respondents noted challenges in expressing themselves in smaller, conservative communities compared to larger cities, where they feel more freedom to share their ideas.

Looking ahead, climate change emerges as the primary concern for young people across the Alps, followed by employment-related factors such as work-life balance, well-being, and job opportunities. Political representation is particularly important for Liechtenstein youth, while Slovenian respondents emphasize the negative impact of mass tourism, which they feel prioritizes tourists over residents. These findings align with broader studies that critique inadequate infrastructure and highlight the impact of global crises like the pandemic and climate change.

The interviews underscore the multifaceted nature of quality of life for young people in the Alps, with environmental, social, and economic dimensions interwoven. Improvements linked to reducing urban pollution, enhancing public transport, and fostering cultural and social opportunities are seen as critical steps. The results reflect a clear alignment across Alpine countries, emphasizing shared priorities and aspirations for a better future.

5 Conclusion

The first and key question we looked deeper into in our work is about quality of life at its core: What is quality of life? Through the literature review from each country studied in this research, we noticed that there are not yet enough standardised scientific studies on the topic of young adults in the Alpine region.

We focused our research on finding common denominators on quality of life seen by young people in the Alps, interviewing fifteen individuals from 3 Alpine countries: France, Germany and Slovenia. The following key issues have been identified as cross-borders indicators for a good quality of life in the Alps for young people:

- The significance of living environment: nature and work-life balance
For the younger generation in the Alpine region, the living environment is key for a good quality of life. Whether in Germany, France or Slovenia, the interviewees declared the importance of easy access to nature from the place they live. Above all, the desire to pursue leisure activities and have a close connection to nature has an impact on the question of available time and how it is used in everyday life. That is why the working conditions are important for them. The necessity of job security, a wide range of job opportunities, but also a job that is interesting with a high degree of flexibility, are criteria that influence the quality of life of the younger generation. Even more important is the work-life balance, with enough time to fulfil yourself. Necessity of considering the inhabitants more than the tourists is also something related to a good living environment, as mass tourism has big impacts on both biodiversity and quality of life of the people living in the touristic areas.
- Mobility as one of the most important services
Who hasn't experienced it: you run, you hurry and yet the bus or the train runs right away in front of you? This is less of a problem in towns and cities, as the next one is sure to arrive soon, but in rural areas it is a more difficult task. Often people, especially young people, only have the option of hitchhiking or

returning home. This is not a new issue and in the course of our work, regardless of which Alpine country we are in, from France to Slovenia, we are confronted with this topic time and again. During the discussions with the young people, whether in the interviews or in the working groups, the topic of mobility was mentioned frequently, particularly in relation to:

- City-mountain connections: Access to nature and mountains is limited in many Alpine countries. There is a need for improvement in the entire Alpine region, even if there are differences between the respective countries, the situation also varies from region to region within the respective countries.
- Public transport services: The availability of public transport in rural areas to get to the nearest large town or neighbouring village to do the shopping, visit friends or family or simply to get to work is very limited. It is often administrative responsibilities, which vary from one Alpine country to another, that limit this offer and do not sufficiently adapt it to the needs of young adults.
- Need for cultural offerings and social interaction
Depending on the Alpine country, the services offered vary, however most young people interviewed underlined the lack of services, especially cultural offerings. Places to meet new people and interact are also very much needed for young people, showing the significance of strong interpersonal relations, with people they can rely on.
- Climate change: the main impact for the near future
The Alpine region has warmed twice as much as the global average since the end of the 19th century. From heatwaves to severe weather events, glacier melt, water shortages on the one hand and flooding on the other... The list of negative effects on nature and the environment is long. For young adults from the various Alpine countries, climate change and its effects continue to be the issue that will have the greatest impact on their lives over the next 10 years. They underlined its objective impacts on leisure activities or natural resources, but also the emotional burden they can carry from climate change: anxiety and depression. The political answer to it had been mentioned several times as a criterion for a good quality of life, underlining the importance of political consideration for young people's needs and wishes.

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Povzetek

Projekt *Alpine Compass* se je posveča kakovosti življenja mladih, starih od 16 do 30 let, v alpskih regijah Francije, Nemčije, Lihtenštajna in Slovenije. S pregledom obstoječe literature, izvedbo intervjujev in metodologije "živih laboratorijev" ta raziskava opredeljuje izzive in potrebe, specifične za mlade v teh območjih. Cilj projekta je ponuditi vpogled odločevalcem za izboljšanje življenjskih pogojev in spodbujanje trajnostnega razvoja v Alpah. Kakovost življenja je razumljena kot večdimenzionalen pojem, ki vključuje tako objektivne dejavnike (npr. dohodek, stanovanjske razmere, dostop do storitev) kot subjektivne zaznave (npr. počutje, duševno zdravje, zaupanje v vlado, občutek sprejetosti takšnega, kot si). Takšen celosten pristop je usklajen z Alpsko konvencijo, ki poleg gospodarskega razvoja poudarja tudi kulturne, socialne in okoljske vidike.

Metodologija je vključevala analizo obstoječih raziskav o kakovosti življenja v alpskih regijah in intervjuje s 15 mladimi iz Francije, Nemčije, Slovenije in Lihtenštajna. Intervjuji so raziskovali kazalnike, kot so dostop do storitev, stanovanjske razmere, kakovost okolja in osebne vrednote. Ugotovitve so bile primerjane med državami z namenom odkriti podobnosti in razlike. Raziskava poudarja pomen razumevanja pogledov mladih za učinkovito naslavljanje njihovih potreb.

V Franciji se kazalniki kakovosti življenja opirajo na raziskave Nacionalnega inštituta za statistiko in ekonomske študije (INSEE). Pred letom 2009 so bila merila osredotočena predvsem na ekonomske vidike, kot je BDP. Po poročilu komisije Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi iz leta 2009 pa so bila vključena tudi bolj celostna merila, med njimi subjektivne zaznave, kot so ravni stresa in zaupanje v vlado. Raziskave v regiji Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur razkrivajo razlike med območji s smučarskimi središči in bolj oddaljenimi predeli. Prva imajo visoko zaposlenost, a pogosto sezonsko in nestabilno delo, druga pa višjo brezposelnost in slabši dostop do storitev. V regiji Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes narava in zaposlitvene možnosti prispevajo h kakovosti življenja, a slaba dostopnost storitev to zmanjšuje. Študije redko obravnavajo posebej mlade ali subjektivne dejavnike, kot je anksioznost.

V Nemčiji je kakovost življenja opredeljena celostno – z ravnotežjem med ekonomskimi, socialnimi in okoljskimi cilji. Kljub temu številne raziskave izključujejo mlade odrasle med 18. in 29. letom. Shellova raziskava mladih (2019) kaže, da nemški mladi cenijo družino, prijateljstvo, okoljsko ozaveščenost in politično udejstvovanje, a so nezadovoljni s političnim vodstvom. Raziskava Mladina v Nemčiji izpostavlja duševne stiske zaradi pandemije, podnebnih sprememb, vojn in inflacije. Skoraj polovica mladih poroča o izrazitem stresu, za razliko od le petine starejših odraslih. Podnebna anksioznost je pogosta in vpliva na duševno zdravje, hkrati pa spodbuja okoljski aktivizem. Poudarjena je potreba po širši dostopnosti storitev za duševno zdravje za mlade.

V slovenskih alpskih regijah literatura izpostavlja močno povezanost med ohranjanjem narave in kakovostjo življenja. Mladi cenijo dostop do neokrnjene narave za rekreacijo, vendar se soočajo z omejenimi zaposlitvenimi možnostmi zunaj turizma. Intervjuji razkrivajo zaskrbljenost glede dostopnosti stanovanj za mlade družine in slabe javne prometne infrastrukture na podeželju. Čeprav slovenske politike poudarjajo trajnostni razvoj v Alpah, pogosto nimajo strategij, osredotočenih na mlade, kot so stabilna zaposlitev ali podpora duševnemu zdravju.

V Lihtenštajnu majhnost države in visoka življenjska raven ustvarjata posebne razmere za mlade. Intervjuji kažejo, da cenijo varnost in bližino narave, a se soočajo s pomanjkanjem kulturnih dejavnosti in družbeno izolacijo zaradi majhnega prebivalstva. Zaposlitvene možnosti so na splošno dobre, a številni mladi izražajo skrb glede dostopnosti stanovanj ob prehodu v odraslost.

V vseh regijah se pojavljajo skupne teme. Zaposlitvene težave so izrazite – mnoga delovna mesta v turizmu so sezonska, nestabilna in slabo plačana. Podeželska izolacija omejuje dostop do osnovnih storitev, kot sta zdravstvo in izobraževanje, dolgi prevozi pa zmanjšujejo kakovost življenja. Duševne stiske med mladimi so pogoste zaradi ekonomskih pritiskov in podnebne anksioznosti. Kljub izzivom mladi zelo cenijo bližino narave, čeprav jih skrbi njeno onesnaženje in degradacija.

Raziskava izpostavlja pomembne razlike v kakovosti življenja mladih po alpskih regijah. Čeprav mladi cenijo naravo in skupnostne vezi, ostajajo težave, kot so nestabilna zaposlitev, slab dostop do storitev in duševne stiske. Odločevalci morajo dati prednost strategijam za mlade, ki bodo odpravile te vrzeli in spodbujale trajnostni razvoj regij. Projekti, kot je *Alpine Compass*, poudarjajo glas mladih in prispevajo k bolj vključujoči prihodnosti prebivalcev Alp.