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ACTION GROUP 5

To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services

Alpine Think Tank on Services of general interest

How digitalization changes the delivery of Services of General Interest SGI -

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1. Background and aims

Services of General Interest SGI and digital accessibility are an important topic within the Macroregional strategy for the Alpine area EUSALP. Action Group 5, which is one of nine AG's of EUSALP, is dealing with this topic. A Think Tank composed of several experts from all Alpine countries has been established in 2016 to discuss these topics and give strategic orientation.

With this publication, the Think Tank wants to contribute to the ongoing discussions on international, national, regional and even local level on this topic. Regional disparities and gaps between urban and rural areas are becoming bigger and bigger. Services of general interest are therefore becoming more and more important in order to provide equal opportunities for all citizens and enterprises. Digitalization can help to improve the delivery of those services and to provide new ones, thus making rural areas more attractive.

In the first semester of 2021, the members of the Think Tank have analyzed the potentials, digitalization offers to improve existing services and to develop new services. The present publication summarizes the outcomes of this discussion. Experiences from the Covid-19-crisis have also been taken into account. This crisis underlines once more the crucial role of SGI, e.g. with a strong health sector, the availability of local grocery shops and robust digital infrastructures.

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2. Digitalization in various fields of SGI

In this chapter, we try to identify how digitalization helps to improve the access to existing services of general interest and which new services can be developed. What good examples do exist, which actions are needed and which recommendations can be formulated? We do also try to show the limits of digitalization in every field. This is crucial, as the fundamental idea of SGI is to provide equal access to everybody. Digitalization shall therefore not create new disparities or inequalities. The keyword is: "leave no one behind". Chapter 2 is structured along different sectors of SGI. This is to underline the potentials of digitalization in each sector. In each chapter, we try to identify the potentials for cooperation with other sectors. These findings are then brought together in chapter 3.

2.1 Postal services

Postal services were long time seen as the physical delivery of letters and parcels. But digitalization has changed this domain to a great extent. Letters are more and more replaced by e-mail. The amount of letters delivered by postal services has constantly declined. On the other side, the delivery of parcels is steadily increasing as more and more products are ordered online. This trend is confirmed e.g. by the EU-Commission in its report on the postal market 2021: «Between 2000 and 2018, the international letter post (including small packets) declined by 52% while the international parcel post grew by 332%. In contrast, in domestic postal markets, letter post volume declined by 28% while parcel post volume increased by 108%, globally»[1] This trend has reached new peaks during the Covid-19-crisis, when many shops were instructed to close. Such a development towards more and more online shops is there to stay. New ways of delivering parcels are being explored, e.g. by using drones.

With the liberalization of the postal market and the changing needs and technical opportunities, traditional postal offices have been largely reduced in most countries. On the other hand, the arrival in small villages of vans to deliver parcels s more and more frequent. Traditional post counters were partially replaced by new cooperation models, e.g. with fuel stops, grocery shops or other services. The physical access to postal services has therefore been reduced to a great extent. This provided a big discontent amongst the population and local politics in the affected territories. This public discontent is emblematic for the high relevance of SGI above all in rural and mountainous areas.

Digitalization can help to improve the situation by easing the access to certain services like e.g. banking services, printing stamps at home etc. Digitalization offers also new opportunities to combine different services. The Swiss Post has e.g. introduced a new service for the delivery of regional products. Combining thus agriculture and postal services and strengthening short supply chains. For more information see https://www.post.ch/en/sending-parcels/domestic-parcels/regional-product-delivery

[1] EU-Commission: International postal service regulation and renumeration, 2021, p. 62. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/946318c8-604e-11eb-8146-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-189430505

New services that can be provided by postal service providers are e.g. in the fields of E-Health (electronic patient dossier), E-Government (E-ID, E-Voting), Access to Open Data and so on. The postal service providers do often have the necessary technical know-how and a large network thanks to the access to their clients and their offices.

Nevertheless, digitalization has also its limits. Digitalization needs performant and robust telecom-networks, which are not yet available in all rural and mountain areas. It will probably take up to the year 2030 to achieve the EU-Goal of the Gigabyte-Society. And it should not be forgotten, that not all social groups of the population have equal access and ability to deal with digitalization. Especially elderly people cannot be considered on the same level as “digital natives”. This means, that for about one generation to come, digital and analogue channels of distribution have to be provided in parallel. This means also that digitalization does not automatically lead to massive cost reductions for the service providers, as different channels have to be offered in parallel. Policy makers must be aware of those limits and constraints.

2.2 Public Transport

Digitalization can help to improve the delivery of existing public transport services. Thanks to digitalization, tickets can be bought online and from everywhere and at any time. Services can be paid with digital means and on demand services can be booked online. The travel experience can be rendered much more attractive with the digital provision of pre-trip and on-trip information. When creating new digital offers, it is of utmost importance that the customers are at the heart of all reflections. Digitalization and ICT can also replace mobility by providing digital access to e.g. workplaces, education and healthcare service. This potentially allows saving time, costs and negative effects as congestion and pollution related to mobility.

Digitalization shall not be seen merely as a means to reduce costs of the service providers. Digitalization shall help to ease the access for customers and it is able to attract new users with unquestionable benefits also for the environment and the energy consumption. In this context, there’s still a huge potential for harmonizing the fare-schemes, ticketing systems and timetables across the alpine area. Actually, each Alpine country or even region has an own way to establish public transport fare and organize subscription. Furthermore, complicated ticketing systems and not harmonized offers

in public transport are a major barrier for customers. This is a reason why most cross-border commuters in the alpine area prefer cars to public transports and why many tourists prefer to travel the whole distance by car as well (for more info on this topic, see the findings of the Crossborder-project: https://www.alpine-region.eu/projects/arpaf-crossborder). When introducing new offers in touristic transports, one has always to keep in mind the whole travel experience, from home to mobility at the destination and back. It would be useless to advocate for public transport for the journey to the tourism destination if at the destination itself public transport are not available in an appropriate way.

Digitalization is a strong tool to strengthen cooperation across all transport providers, keeping in mind the customer perspective. In this context, mobility must be seen more and more as a service, able to provide a door-to-door travel experience by using, if needed, different modes operated by more companies. The Mobility as a service MaaS concept is defined as the integration of various forms of transport services into a single mobility service accessible on demand. Various levels of integration can be identified according to https://medium.com/@transitprotocol/what-is-mobility-as-a-service-672259066c87:

Digitalization offers numerous opportunities for new services in public transport. These can be e.g. the use of autonomous vehicles and new offers coming out of the basic idea of the Sharing economy like e.g. Uber and Ummadum. Such offers can help to complement regular offers and to disserve areas, which are not covered by regular public transports, especially in the first or last mile. A concrete example for autonomous vehicles is the TERMINAL project. The TERMINAL project intends to investigate the possibilities of automated buses in public cross-border-passenger transport and to prepare their successive use in pilot projects. For more information see: https://terminal-interreg.eu/en/the-first-cross-border-field-test-with-automated-minibuses-in-regular-service/#section-12

The improvement of existing and the delivery of new services will only work, if data are available. Timetables have to be harmonized, offers to be included in them, access to tickets has to be guaranteed for the costumers in the simplest way, if possible by one click only. Data can be considered in this context as more and more relevant in the sense of a public service.

Digitalization in public transport services has also clear limitations:

- General transport obligation for all passengers. Special attention has to be paid to elderly people, children and disabled persons.
- Lacking availability of digital payment tools among low-income users.
- Lack of proper ultra-broadband connectivity in several remote areas.
- Non-existence of combined tickets for different means of transport.
- Lack of information on time tables.

For the policy level it is important to recognize the full potentials offered by digitalization in public transports and its limits. Nevertheless, regulations are mostly lagging behind such new developments.

In a first stage, regulations should foresee flexibility for innovation and experimentation. Germany has e.g. introduced an article on experimentation in its legislation on public transports. Thus, new offers can be tested during up to four years. If they are successful, they will thereafter be accepted as a regular offer.

Later, the rather new concept of MaaS must be clearly regulated including the way subsidies are allocated among the service providers (until now, only the conventional public transport is subsidized). And last but not least, the access to data should be regarded as a public service. The sharing of data of service providers should be made compulsory. In this sense, not only the digital infrastructures should be regarded as public service but also the Open Data Infrastructure.

The Finnish regulation is the most comprehensive example of how MaaS can be regulated. The Act on Transport Services of 2017 (https://www.lvm.fi/en/-/act-on-transport-services-955864) brings together transport market legislation and creates the preconditions for digitalization of transport and new business models. Its key aim is provision of customer-oriented transport services.

The Gecko project, financed by the EU under the Horizon 2020 Program, deals with governance for new mobility solutions (http://h2020-gecko.eu). It firstly analyzed the state of art regarding both the new services and the current regulations. Then Gecko delivered several regulatory supportive tools: a knowledge bank, a compliance map, policy recommendations and an adaptive regulation roadmap. Relevant stakeholders were involved along this process.

2.3 Telecom Services

Telecom-Services are by nature the main service when it comes to digitalization. It is important that networks and services are constantly adapted to the needs of the consumers. A digital divide between territories or different segments of the society and economy have to be avoided. Digital infrastructures are in this respect a strong tool to overcome the natural handicaps of mountain, rural and remote areas. A fast roll-out of new technologies especially in these areas is therefore important to improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of those territories. The high relevance of robust and powerful digital infrastructures was well shown during the Covid-19-crisis. Without such infrastructures, the economy and society would not have been able to switch from one day to another to homeoffice and homeschooling.

Infrastructures are one element of the topic, but the services that can be delivered are also extremely important. Fiber optics and the actual technology for mobile communication 5G offer the potential for completely new services. The Think Tank for SGI in the Alpine area has collected some good practices on the potentials of 5G in a special publication: https://www.alpine-region.eu/publications/improving-accessibility-services-general-interest-through-new-digital-opportunities.

To identify these potentials, the Smart villages approach can be helpful. The Smart villages approach is a participatory approach. A participatory process will be launched in a municipality or region to evaluate the actual state of digitalization, explore the potentials for new approaches and implement them based on the identified needs. This approach has been tested and implemented in the Alpine Space program Project “Smart villages”, which is a Strategic Initiative of AG5 of EUSALP. For more information see: https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/smartvillages/en/home. Within the project, the Digital Exchange Platform has been developed, which is available, free of charge, for every interested municipality or region. It allows a Smartness self-assessment and the comparison of good practices. A network of Alpine Smart villages and regions “SMART ALPS” has been created to encourage the exchange of experiences and information.

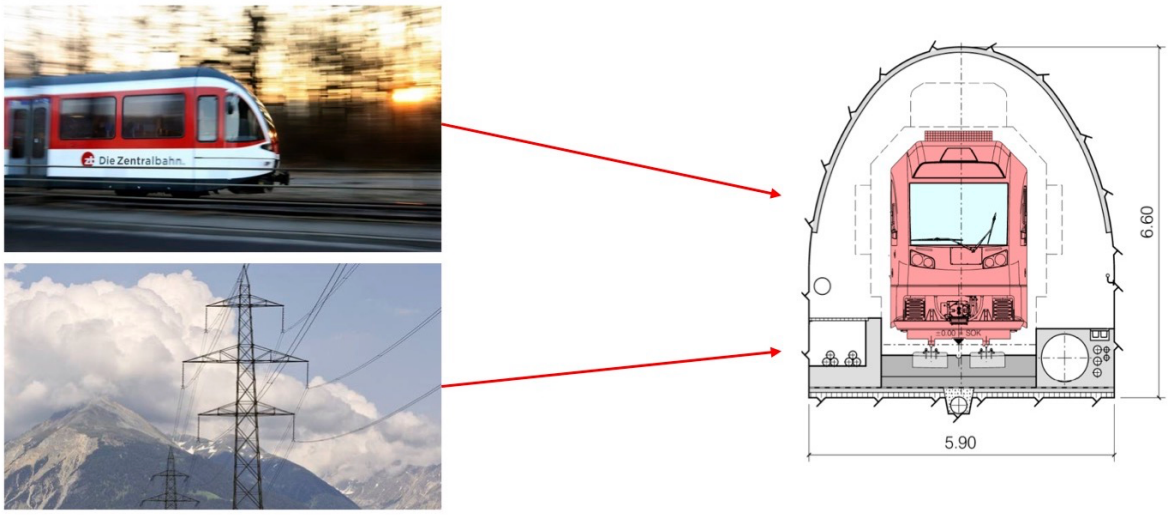
The use of the potentials of Digitalization has in this respect a lot to do with social innovation and territorial development. To unleash this potential, it is important to offer counselling services to the society and the economy. The Digital Innovation Hubs in the EU offer such services (https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-innovation-hubs-dihs-europe).

Regulation must make sure, that territories are equipped with a minimum bandwidth, allowing the efficient use of the new technologies. Regulations should also allow and foresee the flexibility to search for synergies with other SGI-Domains to develop new services and to improve the use of the existing ones through better cooperation. A completely new service of general interest might be in the future not just the access to digital infrastructures but also the access to digital data. Data are extremely relevant. A fair access to these data is important to create equal opportunities. And these data must be validated, because many data of doubtful reliability are around in the net. The risk of misinformation is extremely high. Public authorities therefore have a high interest in making reliable data available to the public in the sense of Open Data. An example is the Swiss Open Data Portal https://opendata.swiss/de.

2.4 Electricity

The electricity sector has a huge potential to deliver improved and new services thanks to digitalization. Buzzwords are amongst others: Smart grids, Smart metering, Smart living, energy efficiency, electrification of the individual mobility etc. With the high relevance of climate change and the needed change of behavior, these elements in the electricity sector are receiving a high public attention. The cited examples like smart living and smart mobility are also clear indication for the combination of services.

In addition, infrastructures can and should be better combined. The bundling of linear infrastructures is still not yet enough advanced. Roads, railway lines, water conducts, gas pipelines, electricity lines etc. should be bundled as far as possible. This leads to a reduction in the impact on the landscape and use of soil. A very innovative project is in this respect the planned Grimseltunnel. It combines a new railway tunnel with an electricity line. The existing electricity line across the Grimsel pass will be dismantled and the impact on the landscape therefore massively reduced. The tunnel itself will be 22 kilometers long.



Project of the new Grimseltunnel, bundling railway and electricity line. More info on https://www.grimseltunnel.ch.

The provision of electricity must also be seen as a critical factor for digitalization. How can the much higher demand for electricity – in the EU, it is estimated to be 6-10 times higher than now by 2030 – be covered? In reference to the EU green deal and the general strife for a carbon neutral society this must be part of the debate for more digital services. The same holds true for the Non-EU-countries. This debate on the future energy supply is nevertheless out of scope of the present report of the Think Tank on SGI. But a potential shortage of electricity has to be taken into account when talking about digitalization and improving existing or developing new services.

2.5 Media

Media are not in all countries considered as a Service of general interest. But due to their relevance for forming the public opinion and access to factual information, they are nevertheless taken into consideration in this publication. It is not by chance, that media are sometimes called the fourth power. They can influence the public opinion to a large extent. A diverse media landscape which offers access to professional and balanced information is therefore crucial.

The media landscape is undergoing a deep transformation. Many printed newspapers have already disappeared or are facing severe challenges. The revenues from publicity are strongly declining. Consumers are more and more changing to online services. Especially young people prefer online services free of charge and information via social media. This is a big challenge for keeping up a professional and equilibrated journalism. The danger is great, that this will more and more disappear and be replaced by information consumption in "bubbles". People are exchanging their opinion in online fora and on social media and tend to stay in their own respective "world". This can lead to severe misinformation and finally to social unrest. The phenomenon could be largely observed during the campaign for the election of the actual US President Joe Biden and during the ongoing Covid-19-crisis. This phenomenon can also be misused by state actors or subversive elements to change the political opinion in a given region or country.

To counterbalance the tendency as described above, it is important to support qualitative media (electronic and printed) through a respective regulatory framework and if necessary through financial support. It is foremost the small local media, which are facing the biggest challenges. They should therefore be encouraged in priority in order to keep up a diverse media landscape.

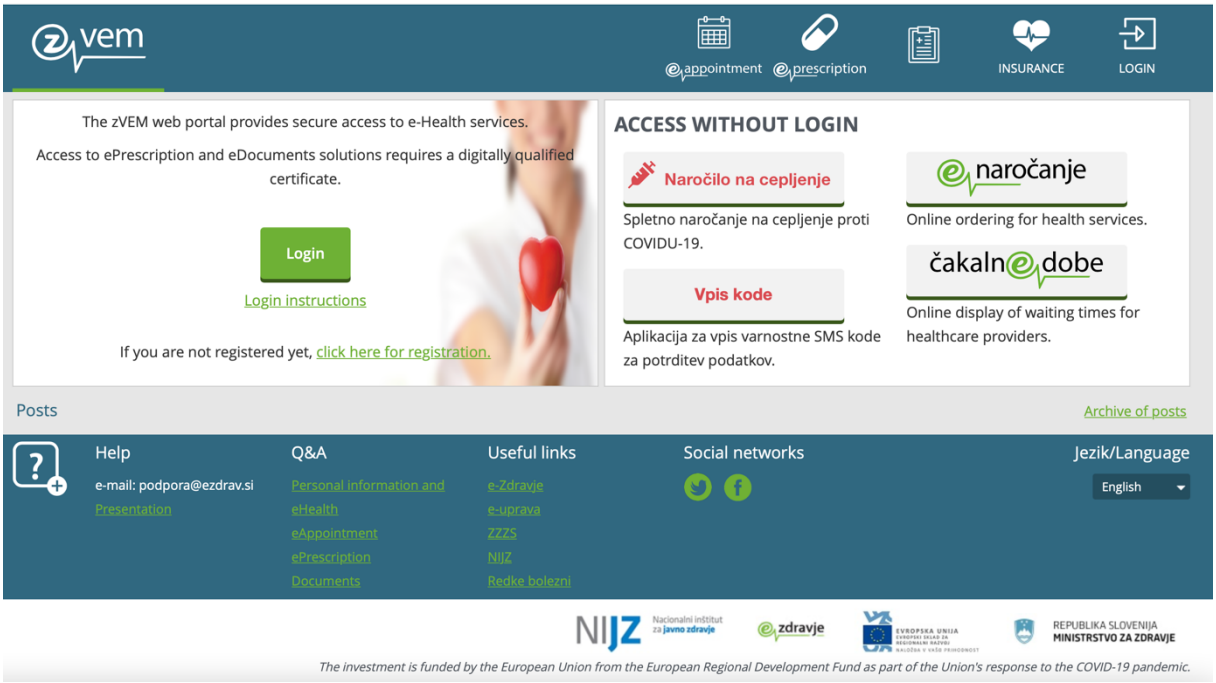
Digitalization offers huge potentials for the media sector and allows the convergence of the different media channels (Radio, TV, Press). It offers also the potential for further cooperation with other sectors of SGI like e.g. telecommunication or postal services. The Digitalization should therefore be actively encouraged by regulation and by financial support mechanisms. A modern support to SGI in the media sector should therefore not only cover the printed media but also professional online media. Innovation and production should be supported. It must be kept in mind, that consumption is not any more linear and that digital offers are becoming more and more personalized (streaming, newsfeed etc.). To guarantee a professional journalism (print and online), the professional skills of journalists can be actively supported. On the other side, the media-competence of the consumers must be strengthened in order to allow them to properly evaluate the quality of media and their relevance.

But Digitalization in the media sector has also its limits. The limits are e.g. the digital infrastructures. If in some territories, bandwidth is very low or simply inexistent, printed press can not be replaced by online media. It has also to be taken into account, that not all social groups are inclined or even able to use online media. So, also in the sector of media, a parallel system of digital and "analog" services will have to be provided for quite some time.

2.6 Health-care

The potential of digitalization in health-care is still not exploited to its full extent. Especially for remote and rural areas which face a severe decline in the provision with medical services (medical cabinets, pharmacies, hospitals etc. closing down and concentrating in urban areas), digitalization offers a means to improve the access to services. Telemedicine is on concrete application. In addition, the system of Advanced Practice Nurses, which work in remote areas via online connections with doctors placed in cities is well known. Health tracking tools can help to speed up the intervention process. 5G offers again new possibilities such as e.g. speeding up the medical intervention chain or allowing intervention with remote access from specialized medical personal. For further reading on 5G, see also the dedicated good practice collection of the Think Tank: : https://www.alpine-region.eu/publications/improving-accessibility-services-general-interest-through-new-digital-opportunities.

When developing E-Health, it has to be taken into respect, that every territory has its own needs and prerequisites. This needs differentiated solutions. E.g. in Slovenia, the online-platform https://zvem.ezdrav.si/domov offers the possibility to do different healthcare activities without seeing or contacting a doctor or a healthcare center.



Health-care and especially E-Health offer also a lot of potential for synergies with other services. Electronic patient dossiers could e.g. also be issued and managed by the Post or a telecom provider. The post has also a large logistic network, allowing the delivering of medicines. But in many countries, the regulations are not yet flexible enough to allow such combinations.

Health-care is a very sensitive domain. We are dealing with personal data of individuals. These data must therefore respond to high levels of data protection. This can sometimes be a limiting factor for the fast rollout of new solutions. On the other side, it justifies a high commitment of public authorities to guarantee data protection. This does not mean, that the public authorities have to make the data available themselves, but they have to fix clear standards and to control their implementation.

2.7 Daily needs

Especially in rural areas, more and more shops are closing down. This is not only due to the decline of population but also because the behavior of consumers is changing. The trend in the 1990ies to 2010s was to buy products for daily needs once a week in a big shopping mall in an urban area. This was also seen as a kind of social event. Everywhere over Europe, big shopping malls were built, sometimes within the urban centers, but mostly outside of them, which lead to decrease of attractiveness of many city centers and to more traffic. Since the 2010s, there's more and more the tendency to order products online. This phenomenon made a further jump in 2020 with the Covid-19-crisis.

In rural villages, the mere existence of a shop is an important factor for the attractiveness. It is not only important for the provision with products (often from the region) but also as a meeting point for the population. So, it has also a social value. Therefore, in many municipalities, public authorities support "their" local shops with special regulatory frameworks and sometimes even with subsidies (e.g. buying the infrastructure and renting it then to a provider). A combination of different services can be very fruitful, such as the combination of a shop with a pharmacy, tourism office, municipal services, postal services etc.

The trend towards more and more online ordering cannot be stopped. So, it also important to see the potentials offered by digitalization and to provide new or improved services. The combination of postal

services and the delivery of regional food has already been described in the chapter on postal services. In the town of Burgdorf and its surrounding rural municipalities, a delivery service has been created with the platform https://www.wir-bringens.ch. The platform is being carried by a foundation which works with persons in social distress. They take orders and deliver them with E-Bikes. So it is not only a project for the delivery of supplies but also for social integration.

Digitalization offers also new possibilities for the traceability of products. In the scope of the Alpine Space program Project Smart villages, the blockchain technology has been introduced in Pomurje in Slovenia, to trace the origins of agrofood. The consumer on the market can get the information of the whole supply chain by scanning a QR-code with his smartphone. The use of new technologies helps to promote local products and foster regional added value chains (short supply chains).

Blockchain technology for the traceability of agrofood in Pomurje, for more information, see https://smart-villages.eu/language/en/good_practice/blockchain-based-digital-transformation-of-a-short-food-supply-chain/

2.8 Municipal services / public administrations

Digitalization has a huge potential to provide municipal services more efficiently. It is also the change in behavior of the citizens which leads to the request for more and more digitalized services. As with all Services of general interest, services have nevertheless also to be provided so that no one is excluded. In this way, also persons who are digitally not fit can have access to the same level of services if the needed support and education are provided. A further aspect which should not be neglected is the loss of personal contacts with citizens. Digitalization can lead to a loss of personal contacts. There is thus a risk, that public authorities lose the feeling for the expectations of the citizens. This must be compensated by other means of communication like participatory processes, for a for discussion, meeting points etc.

Many initiatives and instruments for the digitalization of public services have already been introduced. It would be almost impossible to produce an exhaustive list of them. So here are just a few examples:

- Digital services portal, like the national eGovernment portal in Slovenia: https://e-uprava.gov.si/en
- E-publication of official information
- Practitioners within public administrations help other Practitioners (e.g. Digitallotsen: https://smart-villages.eu/language/en/good_practice/training-of-a-digital-pilot-for-the-municipality-administration-digitallotsen/).
- Practitioners within public administrations develop new solutions (e.g. Public Innovators Canton AG, see the initiative Fit 4 Digital, Canton Aargau: https://www.f4d.ch)

- Smart Service portal.
- Regional support center for municipalities, e.g. RW-Oberwallis (https://www.rw-oberwallis.ch/projekte/digital-service-center-fuer-gemeinden-im-oberwallis).
- New tools for communication with the population like Whatsapp, Facebook, Gem2ToGo https://www.gem2go.at, Megaphone (https://megaphone.info), Crossiety https://www.crossiety.ch and many others. Some of the cited tools were introduced by municipalities just prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19crisis and proved their worth during the crisis, as public authorities could communicate fast and easily with their population.

Online primary assembly during the Covid-19-crisis in the municipality of Täsch (CH) (https://www.schweizer-gemeinde.ch/artikel/wenn-die-urversammlung-live-im-wohnzimmer-stattfindet).

Digitalization offers a great potential also for the combination of different municipal / regional services with other services. Some of them have already been mentioned previously like the combination of E-Government with postal and telecom services. Still, there is potential to be explored like e.g. cooperation between media and official E-publications, cooperation in E-Voting systems etc. To explore these potentials requires an open attitude and the willingness to escape from beaten paths. Legislation may need to be adapted to allow the required level of flexibility. A case, where legislation actively supports the digital transformation of public administrations is e.g. the Law on E-Government of Bavaria (https://www.gesetze-bayern.de/Content/Document/BayEGovG/true).

The online access to the services provided by the Public Administrations should also be simplified as much as possible. This is the aim of the digital identity systems implemented by several EU countries, such as Italy (Spid: https://www.spid.gov.it/en/) and France (France Connect: https://franceconnect.gouv.fr/). After having obtained such digital ID, often provided by intermediaries like the post office, every citizen can access the services with the same user name and password in a secure way.

Grouping different services into a same building is of course another approach. A well-known example are the “Maisons de services au public” in France. At the end of the year 2019, 1’676 such Maisons have been officially labeled. The program is steered by the Commissariat Général à l’égalité des

territoires CGET and each specific case is built up based on the identified needs of the respective territory. Therefore, the combination of the services provided in the "Maisons de services au public" follows the logic of a variable geometry. The "Maisons de services au public" have recently changed their name and became "France services": https://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/france-services.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

In the previous chapter, we have deliberately chosen a sectoral approach to show the potentials of digitalization for the delivery of Services of general interest. The topics chosen were not exhaustive, e.g. the education sector is missing, but could nevertheless illustrate the great potentials offered by digitalization.

Digitalization offers huge **potentials** in various ways:

- It can help to improve the delivery of traditional services, taking into account new technological opportunities and the change in behavior of consumers. Digitalization can help to improve the efficiency within the companies delivering the services. Digitalization can also help to reduce waiting times (health and social care), improve the environment by promoting public transports and avoiding traffic as well as by reducing land use as there's less need for shopping malls etc. But in any case, introducing new digital approaches needs thorough reflections from the consumer side and must be designed from the perspective of consumers and not from the perspective of service providers. For consumers, digitalization must bring advantages like easier access to services, more transparency and so on.
- Digitalization can also help to design and introduce completely new services like e.g. an E-ID or an electronic patient dossier.
- Digitalization allows more and more convergence of different services. An E-ID could e.g. be designed conjointly by a postal services provider and a telecom provider. So, digitalization offers the potential for more and more cooperation across service providers and across sectors. Digitalization can therefore help to go for an integrated approach to services. Furthermore, combined multiservice hubs with diverse services for citizens are feasible thanks to digitalization. Such multiservice hubs and coworking spaces are also places, where people can meet physically. In addition, they help to maintain jobs, render territories attractive and avoid commuting.

Digitalization of services has also **risks and limits**:

- Digitalization can only work, if there's a well developed digital infrastructure available. Else, digitalization would lead to a digital divide, which is exactly the opposite of the idea of Services of general interest.
- The same holds true for the digital skills. If parts of the population are not ready or not able to use the new services offered by digitalization, this would lead to social marginalization.
- As digitalization replaces direct personal contacts, this can lead to social isolation. In a way, remote areas may become even more remote.

To conclude, a few **Policy recommendations** can be formulated:

- In order to promote accessibility to public services, **harmonization of different national legislations** as well as data bases and technical solutions would be welcome (very relevant in Alpine area, where border areas face the accessibility problems even more than other areas).
- Digitalization works only with robust **digital infrastructures**. The rollout of modern broadband infrastructures with equal access all over the territories is therefore the basis. The rollout of new technologies as actually the 5G technology for mobile communication should therefore take place in mountain and rural areas at first, so to create a comparative advantage and not a new (temporary) digital divide.

- With strong tendencies towards more and more digitalization of services, the ownership of and **access to data** as well as data protection, consumer protection, protection from cyber risk etc. become extremely important. These tasks cannot be left to the market. The regulation of the Data-Infrastructure should therefore also be considered as a public service.
- The SGI-provisions in all thematic areas must be adapted constantly to the **needs of the consumers** and the technological opportunities.
- **Capacity building** for service provider and for consumers must be enforced. A digital divide in capacities and knowledge must be avoided. Assistance services should constantly offered to support citizen in the use of technology.
- The SGI-regulations should also foresee special incentives for the service providers to work together across thematic areas. This can be done by fixing certain objectives, by subsidizing concrete pilot activities etc. Regulations at all levels must encourage digitalization and allow the flexibility to test new approaches. An **integrated, territorial approach** to services should be favored.
- When adapting the regulations on SGI to the potentials of digitalization, the limits of digitalization must also be taken into account. The notion of SGI says, that **no one must be left behind**. This can also mean, that not all services can be fully digitalized or that alternative services must always be available for those in need. This leads also to the conclusion, that introducing digital services does not necessarily reduce costs of SGI-provision. “Digital” and “analogous” services, as well as support and education, have to be provided in parallel at least for quite some time to come.
- Digitalization can also lead to social isolation, psychic stress and to a **loss of contact between public authorities and citizens**. It is therefore important, that mainly at local level public authorities strive to create opportunities and points for physical exchanges. This can e.g. be a meeting point in a village or an informal regular opportunity like “drink your coffee with the mayor”.
- Digital services will only work, as long as there’s **electricity**. The supply of electricity, the reliability of those networks and the need to protect them against electricity-shortages or even blackouts is crucial. Redundancy is important with backup systems e.g. in the form of batteries and other ways of electricity-storage.
- Digital services will only unleash their full potentials, if the consumers see an advantage in them and are able and ready to use the services. The **digital skills** of the population and of the SME’s need to be strengthened. Digital Innovation Hubs and other similar initiatives can help a lot in this respect. The ambition must be to create a digital ecosystem.