

**GDI**

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INSTITUTE

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STUDIES

# OUT AND ABOUT WITH SMART ASSISTANTS

A scenario for travelling in the future

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# Summary

The Internet and smartphones have turned the tourism sector upside down. But where will things go from here? We cannot assume that the digital revolution has come to an end and that everything will now settle down again. We expect smart assistants to have as big an impact on tourism as smartphones. By smart assistants, we mean digital counterparts that understand our normal speech and assist us, just like an advisor or coach. In the following study, we sketch out a picture of what it might be like to go travelling with just such an assistant.

Because such assistants won't just be used for the journey alone but also in all kinds of life situations, they will know a lot about our interests and preferences. This means that for the customer, they will become a personal travel agency, navigator, translator, tour guide and so forth, and they will take on all our administrative tasks – such as buying tickets and checking in. For service providers, digitisation means that services can be personalised and evaluated far more effectively. But service providers will have to make a wide range of information machine-readable so that the digital assistant can register the touristic environment – such as menus, occupancy rates for hotel rooms, tables in restaurants, parking spaces and waiting times for mountain railways. Destination management organisations can help service providers make their information digitally visible.

It seems plausible that the most useful assistants will be those that know everything about us, and that combine all possible data about both us and many other people. But if an assistant collects as much data about as many people as possible in all areas of their lives, this naturally becomes problematical for our personal privacy and from a data protection perspective. So we will discuss ways in which a decentralised assistant might function.

It remains unclear whether or not artificial intelligence will ever become as powerful as we describe – and if so, when this might happen. But what is clear is that developments are moving in this direction. We should not wait for a technological breakthrough before engaging with the implications of this paper. If we set about making our destination machine-readable, then we will already become more visible today, and we will be laying the foundations for the future introduction of smart assistants.

But how can we go about digitising our own region? First we have to decide which local factors should be turned into data. This data has to be generated or bought. Apart from procuring the data, it is at least as important to be able to collate it. This is not just about defining standards, but about implementing them as broadly as possible so that it becomes worthwhile for programmers of apps and smart assistants to use them.

Finally, the data in question can be used in three different ways. It can be regarded as a valuable resource and used only via one's own channels – for example, via one's own websites and apps. The second possibility is to distribute the same data via third-party platforms such as Booking.com. The third is to place the data online on open access, available to everyone.

With a view to the emergence of smart assistants, the open-data approach seems to us the most promising. This is because the market for smart assistants has not yet been divided up among just a few big players. It is still unclear who will come out on top, and open data enables us to avoid falling into the hands of the monopolies. Using open data makes a destination visible to all machines. This will provide more of an opportunity for decentralised assistants. And already today, open



data makes it easy to create special applications – such as apps for people with impaired mobility.

In our federal Swiss system, it isn't easy to push through any across-the-board solutions. It's important to understand that using open data means we have to agree on a common language and on common standards (comparable to HTML standards), not on any common end solution such as a website or an app. If we don't do this, then someone is surely still going to impose a standard on us anyway – only we won't have any say in the matter, because that «someone» is likely to be a company from Silicon Valley.