



# **ALPINE COOPERATION POTENTIAL**

Practical cooperation potentials between alpine regions

O.T1.1



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## Introduction

Many good reasons speak in favour of cooperation initiatives within Alpine regions and among municipalities that support finding ways to deal with and accommodate pluralism in a changing society. Municipalities face increasing social diversity, changing age and economic structures or depopulation. These changes require municipalities and regions to look for trusty cooperation partners as well as funding to realize project ideas. Cultural diversity can lead to innovations, as research shows, when welcoming and integration of newcomers and a culture of recognition and esteem are lived and considered a responsibility shared and shouldered by different actors.

Local communities engage in diversity, they look for solutions to answer to local needs and challenges. Cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary and inter-municipal cooperation support in thinking outside the box, to learn about other integration realities and experiences, that are embedded in governance models and regulatory environments that differ across the Alpine countries.

To see where the Alpine area stands in terms of welcoming and social planning, in an analysis phase, project partner Eurac Research investigated the PlurAlps project environment: which good practices of welcoming and social planning already exist? How do governance and networks look like in the field of interest? What are the requirements for developing a social planning instrument?

The document at hand summarizes the main project outputs and most relevant findings of the analysis phase in the PlurAlps project. For more detailed accounts of the individual results, we invite you to visit the analysis section on the PlurAlps website.

## 1. PlurAlps' main outputs and instruments

Through initiatives launched within the PlurAlps project, exchange and cooperation among regions and municipalities from across the Alps have resulted in [tailor-made solutions to local integration challenges](#), in granting the first [Alpine Pluralism Award](#) and [sharing good practices](#), in enhancing municipalities' capacities in [social planning](#), as well as in a set of recommendations targeted at policy-makers ([White Paper](#)). At the same time, local and regional networks were strengthened, and small-scale local initiatives were given a voice and stage to present themselves.

PlurAlps developed and tested services and practices for welcoming newcomers, that consider the quality of life of all citizens. The initiatives are all combined in an [innovation toolbox](#).

For increasing social cohesion and territorial attractiveness, the European Union's transnational cooperation programmes are valuable instruments targeted at regional development. Its practice-oriented approach facilitates the involvement of citizens and civil society. Cooperation structures, especially the Interreg-Alpine Space Programme in the current programming period, enable actors to design and deliver services of general interest that contribute to a common standard of services of comparable quality in a mountain area marked by populous regional cities, depopulated valleys, rural/remote areas, varying levels of innovative capacities and social network density as well as funding opportunities.

## 2. Vast thematic variety across the Alps

In PlurAlps, the majority of initiatives present in the pilot areas and the ones consulted during the project can firstly be assigned to the **religious-cultural** and secondly to the **socio-economic sphere of integration**, where municipalities have the room to manoeuvre and the respective competences, shared or wholly. Most commonly, cooperation is in the fields of training and schooling, intercultural dialogue, and culture and leisure<sup>1 2</sup>. The [Overview report on social planning and welcoming projects](#) provides an explorative and comparative analysis of cases regarding the integration of newcomers in the PlurAlps territories. It includes insights concerning the projects' initial phase of implementation and general context and specific motivation, the experiences gained during their exploitation and in some examples also a foresight to future prospects and development of the initiative based on a reflected self-evaluation.

In the pilot areas, a large number of initiatives deals with learning/teaching the local/national language/s to newcomers, supporting them to find a job and a home, or facilitating the access to public services, and providing important information in different foreign languages – i.e. key issues for being able to build up a life in a new environment. In the pilot areas, to name just a selection, there exist language cafés and courses, welcoming folders for new inhabitants and employees, personal welcome talks with newcomers, welcome events for both newcomers and locals, intercultural trainings for public servants, intercultural centres, workshops and events, labour market integration support units, translation and interpretation services, (de)centralized accommodation solutions for asylum seekers, afternoon childcare assistance additionally to regular school offers, provision of legal support, and so on<sup>3</sup>. Some initiatives are part of a greater integration project or programme embedded in a local/regional integration plan or act, while others are stand-alone projects responding to *ad hoc* needs (especially after the arrival of refugees in 2015).

*Table 1: Three dimensions of integration (based on Penninx, 2005)*

Socio-economic	Religious-cultural	Political-legal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy &amp; labour</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Healthcare</li> <li>• Training &amp; schooling</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intercultural dialogue</li> <li>• Culture &amp; leisure</li> <li>• Family &amp; youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political-legal rights (political participation, citizenship)</li> </ul>

A large pool of project experiences, knowledge and expertise on different integration topics and dimensions has been made evident. In PlurAlps, services and offers were developed and tested, the [Alpine Pluralism Award](#) was granted for the first time in four categories, and an [interactive map](#) introduces 40 inspiring examples in nine categories, covering topics like social and labour market integration, landscape management, school-work transition, art and media, technology and buildings, human rights, and so on.

<sup>1</sup> For more details see the report “Governance and social networks for welcoming and integrating newcomers” available on: <https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/pluralps/en/project-results/analysis>

<sup>2</sup> “Overview report on social planning and welcoming projects” available on: <https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/pluralps/en/project-results/analysis>

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the range of services accessible see “Analysis Report Pilot territories” available on <https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/pluralps/en/project-results/analysis>

### 3. Multi-level governance matters

The PlurAlps partnership<sup>4</sup> brought together local, regional, and national entities of both the private and public sector: regional development agencies, institutions of higher education, regional and local administrations, integration offices and coordination units, Catholic welfare associations, as well as research and planning institutes. Through the pilot initiatives, the partnership was further enlarged by implementing organizations at the municipal and regional level (Figure 1).

Our study on governance and networks showed **a large number and diversity of actors and sectors concerned with receiving and integrating migrants**, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of integration policy, but at the same time being condition *sine qua non* for local integration efforts to bear fruit. Likewise, however, the study exposed a **lack of cooperation with economic, research, and national governmental actors** in the analyzed territories. Starting from the municipality (municipal administration, staff/unit responsible for integration) as the center/ego of the cooperation, the **most common cooperation partners** are other administrative departments and educational institutions (primary/secondary schools, kindergartens, people's university), followed by civil society actors (migration/integration network organizations, Catholic solidarity/welfare/labour associations, social cooperatives, laic associations). To a lesser extent, economic actors (economic associations, employers' associations, individual employers) are cooperation partners for municipalities, that however represent an indispensable partner for labour market integration. The **most frequent scale of action** in which the cooperation partners are involved is the **municipal, inter-municipal and regional level**.

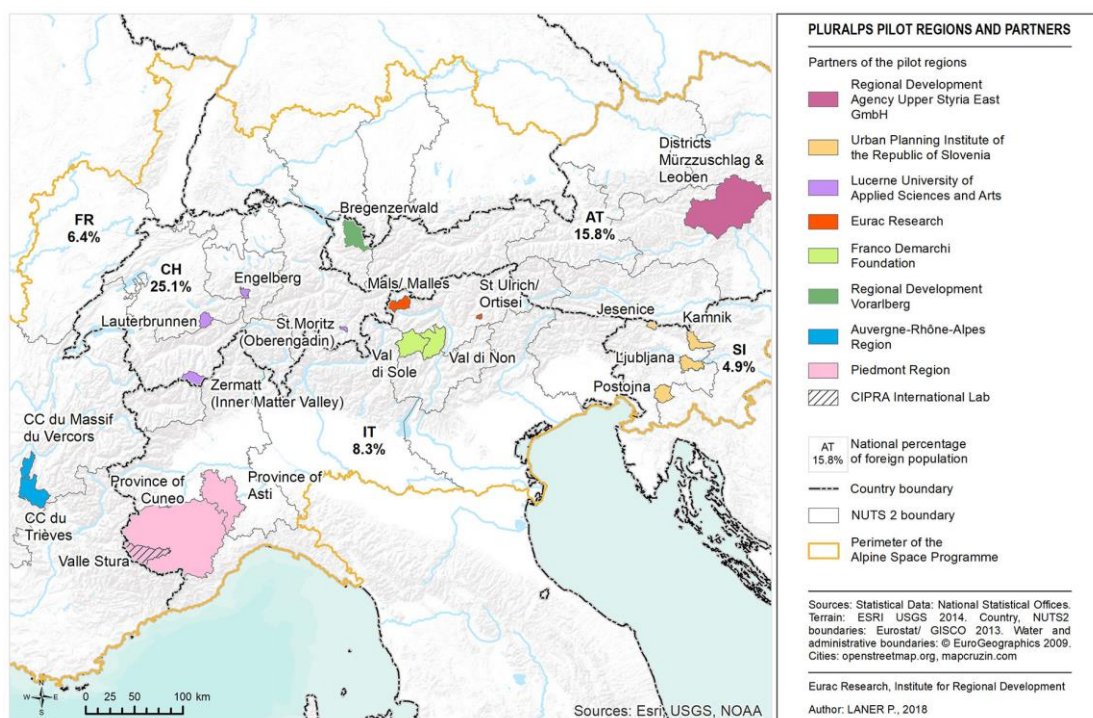


Figure 1: Map of the PlurAlps pilot regions and partners (Laner P, 2018)

Notable is a **very high level of trust** in viewpoint of the municipality and a high to medium level of intensity towards the cooperation partners. Such cooperation is marked by regular meetings, shared decision making, joint development of new

<sup>4</sup> The partnership consists of ten project partners and 27 observer organizations.

approaches and sharing of some resources and responsibilities. In contrast, our survey in the pilot territories revealed (very) **low to medium levels of cooperation formality**. That means, there is in some cases a defined common platform/team/workforce, sharing of information/ideas and informal meetings are taking place, mainly based on verbal agreements. High and very high levels of formality basing on joint master plans or contracts/protocols or official bodies/boards with written agreements are not frequent.

The municipalities' **room for maneuver** in designing local integration processes depends on their sectoral competences, financial means and mechanisms as well as personnel structures and embedment in overall governance structures. Responsible staff, units or councils are mostly installed on the municipal, inter-municipal or regional level. In South Tyrol, for example, every municipality commissions a staff member to deal with integration, while in Switzerland, integration coordinators are active on the regional/cantonal level and responsible for several municipalities.

In several pilot areas, it has been possible to win cooperation partners from almost all areas for the planning and implementation of the pilot project. In this way, competence gaps were filled and a broad support base for the project was secured that also promotes the sustainability of the measure after project closure.

## 4. Towards developing a Social Planning Instrument

A major input for the development of the Social Planning Instrument (SPI) of project partner Alliance in the Alps was developed in the analysis phase, in the form of a [criteria set for the SPI](#) and a [guiding criteria input document](#). A screening of existing functioning social planning instruments allowed to deduct issues and a thematic set of indicators and questions to assess the situation of welcoming culture and integration in the project's pilot municipalities. These three elements were rearranged to link issues with indicators and involved actors. The preparatory documents helped to compress the topic of social planning and define ten action fields (then condensed to nine fields, see section hereafter) and related indicators as well as actors that would in a next step allow an assessment of the state of affairs regarding social planning, integration and welcoming in the pilot municipalities.

Subsequently, the SPI could be developed; its aim: To support mid and long-term social planning that takes the interests of both the local natives and new residents into account. It encompasses the following parts: the process within the municipality, a questionnaire in the form of a user-friendly online tool, and a handbook. The prime focus of the SPI lies on the following two questions:

- What is the quality of life of immigrants and non-natives? How can their quality of life be improved?
- Which services and provisions in the municipality foster a quick integration for all types of immigration – from internal to forced migration?

Consult the PlurAlps website or Alliance in the Alps/Alpenallianz for [all documents of the Social Planning Instrument](#).

## 5. Food for thought and outlook

The findings in PlurAlps are overall in line with results of recent studies **confirming the multi-level governance approach** to integration and the **relevance of social networks** and social capital for the integration of migrants, for labour market integration in particular (OECD 2018, Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017, Marcher et al. 2017,



Schader-Stiftung 2014). It also **confirms** the project's **regional development approach**, geared towards society as a whole, the quality of life of the greater regional community, and across policy areas, that should find particular consideration also in the future programming period for the greater Alpine area. The social planning instrument, which considers nine thematic fields, demonstrates this holistic approach in particular. At the same time, the project showed that **specific services are required for specific target groups (types of migrants) with particular needs**, at different stages of the welcoming and integration process.

As the place, where everyday life takes place, municipalities continue to shoulder a large part of the burden of integration. As PlurAlps and similar projects show, local communities are accepting, willingly welcoming, the cultural diversity brought by newcomers and jointly shape their living together. They move within the given legal framework, often required to (re)adapt *ad hoc* under changing political and legal conditions, as could be observed especially in the course of the past years since the arrival of refugees in 2015, or just recently in Italy and Slovenia in 2019, when legal framework conditions changed.

Deriving from the PlurAlps experiences, the following is recommended to further improve effectiveness of migrant integration efforts and policies on municipal level and within a multi-level governance<sup>5</sup>:

- Cooperation with the economic sector and labour market needs to be strengthened, especially to address labour market integration as prerequisite.
- In many areas there is the need to strengthen relations with the neighbouring municipalities to face local integration challenges together that do not stop at administrative borders.
- Strategies and tools to foster the early involvement of newcomers/migrants (NGOs and migrant associations) side by side with longer-term residents/natives.
- Fostering an integrated policy approach that combines different migrant integration policies (housing, health, employment, etc.) and provides a common basis for these policies across different institutions and catchment areas.

In the course of the project, in particular a **gap** regarding certain topics could be identified that **shall be addressed by future cooperation** among actors in the Alpine regions and municipalities, considering the cross-cutting nature of integration and bearing in mind the overall perspective of a liveable and pluralistic region. These are for example:

- Solutions for affordable housing of young families, singles or single parents, be it asylum seekers/refugees or established residents, since all compete for accommodation on a highly competitive housing market, whereby newcomers from outside the country or Europe generally face greater difficulties in entering the market (due to missing language skills, lacking financial means, unemployment, absence of local networks, etc.).
- Measures that support the school-work transition of migrants and measures that promote the inclusion of migrants into the dual educational path.
- Opportunities and formats targeted at newcomers to learn local languages and dialects, easing access to the local community, services and networks, considering more carefully the needs of newcomers (e. g. after-work courses,

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<sup>5</sup> See the [PlurAlps White Paper](#) that presents 15 policy recommendations aimed at increasing the territorial attractiveness and social cohesion of the Alpine Region through innovative measures that foster pluralism and address migration.



childcare during classes for mothers, course/language café organization in rural areas).

- Developing and applying formats and methods to address political-legal aspects of integration that primarily target newcomers.
- Applying methods and formats of interaction with refugees and asylum seekers that enable an exchange and communication on equal terms.

## 6. Final remarks

The more we look into the specific experiences of the various case studies the more we find out that there are many synergies that could be used in future and throughout the regions if information exchange is facilitated among actors within the ambit of integration, be it practitioners, policy makers as well as educational or social institutions.

For a genuine and sustainable development and unfolding of a welcoming culture, regardless of the specific territorial context and its implications, it is crucial to keep in mind that a welcoming society needs the appropriate “hardware” (legal framework, public offices of references and competence, schools, media institutions) that set the political and legal framework for governance. Equally important is the fact that a welcoming society needs a suitable “software”. That includes cultural “consciousness” and customs, an open attitude and behaviour towards diversity and change requiring time to unfold but also, and especially, that needs to be encouraged and empowered from the public hand to reach the single individual citizen and community member (Kymlicka 2017). Sense of belonging, perception and interaction are to be nourished and accompanied from childhood to adulthood and need to reach newcomers as much as the members of the receiving community to lay the grounds for an enabling environment also with regard to welcoming culture and a pluralistic approach to integration.

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