



EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

# ARDIA-Net

Shaping & Sharing Capacities  
for Cross-Regional Cooperation  
in the Alpine Region and beyond





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# 1. Forewords

## 1.1 The role of cross-regional cooperation in the aftermath of the pandemic

By Prof. Dr. Ralf Kindervater, CEO BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg GmbH, Lead Partner

Over the last decade, four macro-regional strategies have been developed from within and outside the EU, covering a total of 27 countries. These include the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (2009), the Danube Region (2010), the Adriatic and Ionian Region (2014), and the Alpine Region (2015). These macro-regional initiatives based on macro-regional complementarities have shown the immense potential of a joint approach to strengthening innovation and competitiveness in their territories. To address future grand challenges in Europe and to bring the idea of the Alpine macro-region into practice, the regions must work together better and connect their local assets and individual capacities.

As early as 2019, during the preparation phase for the ARDIA-Net proposal (Developing an Alpine Space Research, Development, and Innovation Area by lowering barriers for cross-regional cooperation), the focus was set on connecting macro-regions through cross-regional cooperation in future topics, such as the bioeconomy and health economy. These topics represent the present and future of the Alpine economy. At that time, however, no one could have imagined to what extent this approach would be so relevant. The COVID-19 pandemic changed many aspects of our daily lives and the economy, and these turbulent times should be interpreted as a call for a new mindset that promotes cross-regional cooperation. On top of it, a war in Eastern Europe (Ukraine) broke out during the last few months of the project.

All these major setbacks make us now painfully aware of how vulnerable global value chains and supply chains in the bioeconomy and health economy are, despite the good socio-economic and political conditions previously set in place. Suddenly, the obvious question of "Where does everything come from?" (products in abundance on offer and people could pick and choose where they were sourced from) suddenly turned into a new question: "Where do we get it at all?". A paradigm shift was unveiled. The challenging question is now "How do we position ourselves or



mitigate such crises in the future?". The answer has a lot to do with resilience.

One possibility is to return to regional capabilities or to capabilities within the macro-regions, which can be seen as multi-regional. The development of the S3 strategies for cross-regional cooperation more than ten years ago could be a key basis for this. At the same time, with a similar number of years spent building up the four EU macro-regions, macro-regional work and networking have become pivotal in moving Europe forward and strengthening its economy.

For this purpose, the involvement of the regions at the policy level is of great importance. A common funding framework may simplify cross-regional cooperation within the macro-regions. This was one of the goals of ARDIA-Net. Its ultimate mission was to build a network for future cooperation between regions and make it operational through a multi-level governance approach.

As a basis for present and future cross-regional cooperation, the ARDIA-Net consortium has developed the AlpsConnect scheme, which describes three different options for cross-regional cooperation with different levels of commitment by the regions. One of these options was initiated and successfully implemented by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour, and Tourism of Baden-Württemberg (Germany) through the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call, together with the regions of Brandenburg (Germany), Canton of Fribourg (Switzerland) and Land Salzburg (Austria).

ARDIA-Net brought together experience, learnings, and good practices on cross-regional cooperation in relevant topics, such as the bioeconomy and health economy. One would expect that the turbulent times we have experienced over the last two years paved the way for more cooperation at the macro-regional and cross-macro-regional levels. Indeed, ARDIA-Net outputs have been disclosed in a timely manner and now deserve a better chance to be acknowledged, co-owned and implemented in the aftermath of the pandemic.

## 1.2 Foreword by David Matzek Lichtenstein

Planning and Programming Officer - Macro-regional strategies and post-2020 programming, DG REGIO, European Commission

In 2009, the states and regions around the Baltic Sea managed to install a fundamentally new framework for transnational cooperation: the first EU Macro-Regional Strategy was born. Other macro-regions soon followed this example to create new strategies along geographically defined territories.

Today, four Macro-Regional Strategies for the Baltic, the Danube, the Adriatic-Ionian, and the Alpine region bundle the power of nineteen EU member states and eight non-member states to tackle territorial challenges but also contribute to the goals of the entire EU.

The strategies gain support and input from very different actors: first and foremost, they are bottom-up initiatives, run by the regions and member states, involving all sorts of stakeholders, from government institutions, universities, young and experienced citizens and civil society to inter-governmental treaty organisations and the regional political level.

In Brussels, the strategies enjoy the highest level of political legitimacy that the institutions can provide: the endorsement by the European Council. Therefore, the Commission is pleased to provide technical counsel and assistance.

These strategies, however, do not come with own funding and their implementation must be financed by various programmes, such as the EU Cohesion policy funds, regional/national sources, or other EU sources (such as the regional ERDF, Horizon Europe, etc.) as well as other funds.

For the geographic scope of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), there are already 98 funding programmes in the Alpine area. This me-



ans that there is an evident need to bring together funding mechanisms and thematic priorities within the cooperation framework. In EUSALP, the first thematic financial dialogue networks have evolved over the past year. These will strengthen the link between the strategic goals and the available funding tools.

European legislators have agreed funds regulations for the new funding period 2021-2027 that match this approach: an increased role for Macro-Regional Strategies and a strengthened cooperation component are mandatory in all EU regional development funds. This results in the considerably reinforced role of cooperation actors and the recognition of the work done in transnational or cross-border projects so far. This framework and the sectorial approach chosen by the EUSALP partner states perfectly fit the ambitious agenda of ARDIA-Net. The partners set out to develop a blueprint for a synchronised S3 RDI funding scheme and to consolidate the capacities of governance structures to implement calls and ready-to-use projects in the Alpine macro-region, in the circular-bioeconomy and health economy.

When the partners approached me to become a member of the ARDIA-Net counselling board, this triad of a novel funding scheme, an industrial branch with significant relevance for the overarching political goals of the Commission and the macro-regional approach immediately caught my eye. It was an enriching experience to be a part of this endeavour, however marginally. This is only a first step, but what a step it has been! I would like to thank all the partners for their ambition and dedication and wish you a hearty God-speed!

## 2. A mission-oriented RDI area in the Alpine macro-region: background and main outputs of ARDIA-Net

### 2.1 On the origins of ARDIA-Net

By Michael Keller<sup>1</sup>

The importance of European macro-regions in the context of transformation, innovation and climate change is growing, as already mentioned in the forewords of this publication. These macro-regional initiatives have laid bare the huge potential of a joint approach to strengthening innovation and competitiveness based on macro-regional complementarities. The experience of the last decade has contributed to unearth synergies and unique eco-systems to jointly address shared challenges and opportunities at the macro-regional level. Today, the macro-regions are undoubtedly recognised as fertile grounds for cross-regional innovation in a broad sense (cultural, social, economic, etc.). What all the macro-regional initiatives have in common, however, is a certain malaise in moving from identified potentials to action, in translating opportunities into project implementation. In a practical sense, the general objective of tapping into the potential of innovative ecosystems to address crucial common goals and opportunities can be broken down to a concrete challenge: the implementation of macro-regional objectives will always require translating innovative ideas into social and economic reality, transforming opportunities into jobs, businesses, and new value chains. In other words, the realisation of macro-regional innovation opportunities ultimately relies on project consortia bridging the gap between research and industries, jointly labouring on applied research, development, and innovation (RDI) ventures across borders.

There is no doubt that adequate funding (both public and private) can be considered the driver of any successful RDI initiative. Most cooperation schemes are financed by the EC. They are important tools to advance the European Research Area, but they are not tailor-made to support RDI in the macro-regional context. Very often they require Europe-wide RDI consortia. Other European support schemes, such as Interreg, are better aligned with the macro-regional framework, but rarely support RDI specific cross-border cooperation. Overall, a persistent funding gap has been experienced in recent years at the level of cross-regional RDI projects.

The Alpine region is one of the most innovative regions in Europe with extraordinary potential to develop solutions for crucial environmental and societal challenges. Strengthening the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), but also finding mission-oriented solutions that help cope with climate change, are the key objectives of almost all regional entities across the Alps. For a long time, individual countries and regions within the Alpine Space have been characterised by sophisticated, impact-oriented funding programmes for applied RDI projects, specifically targeting innovation challenges in the fields nowadays covered by the European Green Deal. Across borders, actors from the Alpine regions are crucial players in Europe-wide research collaborations in topics such as the bioeconomy, but also in other transnational cooperation ventures that aim to facilitate territorial integration based on more sustainable and circular ways of creating value. Great ideas have been jointly developed, capacities built, common markets identified, and concepts for cross-regional solutions sketched out. And yet, anybody reasonably honest and recently involved in the macro-regional EUSALP<sup>2</sup> approach will have to agree: it is rare - to say the least - to encounter examples where such common innovation challenges specific to the Alpine macro-region (e.g., sustainability and the bioeconomy) have led to concrete cross-regional applied research and development actions between research and industry partners, including SMEs, from multiple concerned regions and led to new jobs and value chains across regional borders.

Even if thematic regional funding opportunities are available, the critical mass of the individual regions is limited compared to the global challenges they face. The quest for innovation in addressing specific macro-regional challenges requires the exchange of knowledge and infrastructure and cross-border cooperation among academia and SMEs. However, existing cross-regional funding programmes only partially cover this need. Reasons include variations and combinations of the following issues: existing schemes often seem to be too slow and complex to flexibly fund the imple-

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<sup>2</sup> EU Strategy for the Alpine Region

mentation of actions across regions, lack regional focus, and the possibility for regions to influence the scope of funded actions, or simply prove inappropriate for applied RDI ventures that bridge the gap between academia and industry, including SMEs. In a nutshell, the macro-regional innovation drivers need new sustainable power sources.

The establishment of new funding mechanisms across borders can of course be a complex administrative and technical challenge and a sensitive political process. While the creation of new jobs and value chains is generally high on the agenda of regional decision makers, regional authorities tend to be much more reluctant to open their war chests for the investments necessary to bring about such positive innovation externalities. This holds even more so when cross-regional cooperation is at play and fears are fanned of funds crossing borders in the wrong direction, e.g., outward. Furthermore, and with quite some justification, European regions and their citizens are rather disinclined to add complex new governance bodies to already complicated structures and approve additional top-down funding decisions.

This is exactly where ARDIA-Net stepped in 2019, with the ambitious goal to develop concepts and pilot action for effective cross-regional RDI governance and funding schemes across the Alpine region to overcome the identified funding gap, while avoiding falling into the trap of the aforementioned complexities. Within nearly three years of project implementation, ARDIA-Net has demonstrated that it is indeed possible to implement effective cooperation mechanisms, which fully rely on available regional funds and programmes, which are based on de-centralised and bottom-up decision processes and subsidiarity, and in which funds do not have to cross borders. What is more, this is not only true at the conceptual level (please see the detailed presentation of the AlpsConnect Cross-regional Cooperation Scheme in chapter 2.4.1) but as a very real and concrete implementation in the form of the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call, in which four pilot regions provided living proof that ARDIA-Net's ambitious goals from 2019 could be turned into good practice for future co-operation efforts across Europe.

## 2.2 The European Green Deal as the perfect backdrop

By Sergi Costa<sup>3</sup>

Around one month before the European Green Deal<sup>4</sup> was presented in Brussels by Ursula von der Leyen in December 2019, the Kick-Off meeting of ARDIA-Net was held in Stuttgart. Not a bad coincidence, knowing that the scope of the project and the mission behind the Green Deal could walk hand-in-hand through this 33-month long journey that was ARDIA-Net.

The topics of the circular bioeconomy and health economy were considered in the project proposal as the main strategic topics for the economic development of the Alpine Region. Moreover, digitalisation, as a cross-regional theme, was embedded in the intervention logic of the project due to its relevance in the Green Deal, but also as an effective response to the pandemic. Since March 2020, the malfunctioning of many value chains has merely pinpointed the need to make them more resilient, thus giving digitalisation an increasingly key role in this regard.

The European Green Deal, with its ambitious climate targets, aims at addressing all sectors of the EU's economy. Indeed, it is seen as an opportunity to transform the economic model. Behind the expected transformation, a window of new opportunities for innovation and investment and jobs is foreseen. This is precisely where a common RDI area in the Alpine Region and the way in which funding programmes are designed play a crucial role. In consequence, ARDIA-Net gained more credibility and relevance. All actions undertaken during its implementation, addressed to change behaviour and influence attitudes, were per se a quest for transformation.

Thus, the Green Deal turned out to be the (unexpected) perfect backdrop for the implementation of ARDIA-Net, since topics such as the circular (bio)economy gained momentum in regional policy agendas. Several factors positively influenced the progress of the project. On the one hand, the manufacturing sector observed that

part of the regulations and funding programmes would be gradually aligned to the climate goals of the Deal. They assessed how these developments could influence consumer needs and expectations. On the other hand, the fracture caused by the pandemic fostered a re-thinking of business models and value networks. It is not adventurous to say that some companies (mainly mid-caps) adopted digitalisation as a life vest to remain competitive. Broken value chains also showed new ways of manufacturing and doing logistics. In an era in which, for example, local food is increasingly valued by consumers, going back to our origins (from global to 'glocal'<sup>5</sup>) re-gained its *raison d'être*. Here is where digitalisation and "cross-regionality" came into full force. Within this harsh environment caused by the pandemic, a pilot call such as Innovation Express 2021 was a de facto emergency call from some regional ministries in the Alpine, Danube and Baltic Sea regions to counteract the situation in a decisive manner. The pilot call was designed to fund projects related to digitalisation (specifically Artificial Intelligence) and sustainability (a classic overarching term with close links to the circular (bio)economy). The joint effort of the participating regions was also fully aligned with the European Green Deal timeframes.

To sum up, the opportunity provided by ARDIA-Net to support and implement synchronised funding programmes or other collaborative schemes in the Alpine Region was speeded up during the project's implementation. The main two addressed topics (the circular (bio)economy and health economy) recouped momentum from the presentation of the European Green Deal and the breakout of the pandemic. The length and distance of the supply chains for any manufacturing or service company were re-designed during the pandemic and ARDIA-Net contributed humbly to this new 'glocal' approach with funding schemes that support this vision.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en)

<sup>5</sup> Thinking globally, acting locally

## 2.3 New batch of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S4+) and the Common Provisions Regulation: an ultimate boost to cross-regional cooperation

By Michael Keller<sup>6</sup> and Sergi Costa<sup>7</sup>

Smart Specialisation Strategies aim to transform the economic structures of a region or any other geographical unit. In all cases of Smart Specialisation, the starting point is an existing structure with its available capacities and potentials, the transitional path is the formation and development of a transformative activity, and the objective is a structural change. This basic structure has been inherent to the concept since its first appearance in 2009, first in the academic literature<sup>8</sup> and soon thereafter in European policy practice<sup>9</sup> as a result of the reflections of the Knowledge for Growth Expert Group, established by the European Commissioner for Science and Research Janez Potocnik.

The real-world experience with Smart Specialisation gathered over the last 10 years amounts to a large-scale policy experiment of invaluable interest for innovation economists, regional policymakers, and practitioners. Practical implementation challenges have been discussed, conceptual issues debated, and results evaluated and compared. Today, at the beginning of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the concept appears to have been strengthened by this constructive experience. In particular, Smart Specialisation is recognised as a cornerstone of the EU's mission-oriented approach to competitive sustainability and the European Green Deal.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, there is an imperative to deepen existing strategies by embracing sustainable and inclusive growth as specific transformational objectives in a move from S3 towards S4+ (Smart Specialisation Strategies for sustainable and inclusive growth). There is widespread agreement that the incentive for transformative change at a systemic level requires a new understanding of innovation policy, one that is based on a multiscale and cross-sectorial approach, favours the inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society, ad-

dresses transformative system failures, and considers innovation as an ongoing process that allows for experimentation and failures.<sup>11</sup> Specifically related to regional development and regional innovation policy, two reports commissioned by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), have recently attracted significant attention: "Place-Based Innovation for Sustainability" and "Towards a transformative Smart Specialisation Strategy: lessons from Catalonia, Bulgaria and Greece." Both reports point to the necessity and opportunity to combine the established regional innovation paradigm of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) with the goals of the European Green Deal and objectives of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In other words, they highlight the benefits of Smart Specialisation principles to pave the way for long-term and greener economic development strategies.

With its thematic focus on the Alpine region's bioeconomy potential and cross-regional complementarities in Smart Specialisation Strategies, ARDIA-Net was a concrete and impact-oriented contribution to turn S4+ principles into practice in the Alpine Space.

Another complementary form of cooperation that gained strong impetus during ARDIA-Net implementation is the Cooperation under IJG goal 2020+ within the Common Provisions Regulation of the EU Cohesion Policy.<sup>12</sup> This sort of cooperation aims at unlocking joint activities with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State or outside the Union. It facilitates cooperation beyond the borders of a given region or country. These actions can be set up at different geographical levels: interregional, cross-border, transnational or macro-regional. The degree of cooperation and commitment among the territories involved can vary, so the approach of cooperation is not much

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<sup>8</sup> Foray, D., David, P. A., Hall, B. (2009): Smart Specialisation - The Concept. Knowledge Economists Policy Brief no. 9.

<sup>9</sup> See: Foray, D. et al. (2012): Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS 3). Regional Policy, EC.

<sup>10</sup> See, *inter alia*, JRC Seville, News, From S3 to S4: Towards Sustainable Smart Specialisation Strategies: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/jrcseville/items/670313>; McCann, P. and Soete, L. (2020). Place-based innovation for sustainability. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, ISBN 978-92-76-20392-6, doi:10.2760/250023, JRC121271; Foray, D. (2018): Smart specialization strategies as a case of mission-oriented policy-a case study on the emergence of new policy practices. Industrial and Corporate Change, Vol. 27, No. 5, 817-832.

<sup>11</sup> Tödtling, F., Tripli, M., Tesch, V. (2021). New directions for RIS studies and policies in the face of grand societal challenges. European Planning Studies, 1-18. Tripli, M., Zukauskaite, E. and Healy, A. (2020). Shaping Smart Specialisation: The Role of Place-Specific Factors in Advanced, Intermediary and Less-Developed European Regions. Regional Studies, 54, 1328-1340.

<sup>12</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021

different to the need-based approaches described in the AlpsConnect scheme (in this latter case, focused on RDI).

For the cooperation under IJG (Investment for Jobs and Growth), the financial support can come from ESIF programmes at the regional or national level.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, an alignment of specific programme's strategy needs is required among participating countries or regions. That means that the intentions and plans to use cooperation must be stated in the operational programme of the interested region.<sup>14</sup>

The main difference between cooperation in IJG and the long-standing cooperation set forth under the ETC-European Territorial Cooperation/Interreg, is that the former implies cooperation as a methodology, while in the latter cooperation is not only used as a methodology but also as an objective. The second option was used to fund a project like ARDIA-Net.

The IJG-related cooperation should be carried out through a set of activities, such as: a) creating calls for proposals; b) drafting application forms; c) organising networking and partnership events; and d) setting up technical assistance services. In a nutshell, the effort implied for cooperation in IJG is not that far from the work implemented through the Innovation Express pilot call in ARDIA-Net. Probably the main difference is that the pilot call was discussed and organised during the final stage of the last programming period (2014-2020).

Participating regions agreed on the topics and timing for funding, but the intention and plan for collaborating were not elements that were recorded in their respective operational programmes. Moreover, the short timing of the pilot call and its location at the end of a programming period explains why ERDF funds could not be used.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.interact-eu.net/library?field\\_fields\\_of\\_expertise\\_tid=30#3220-publication-guidelines-cooperation-under-ijg-go-al-2020-update-2021](https://www.interact-eu.net/library?field_fields_of_expertise_tid=30#3220-publication-guidelines-cooperation-under-ijg-go-al-2020-update-2021)

## 2.4 Experiences & outputs

### 2.4.1 The AlpsConnect cross-regional cooperation scheme

By Philip Pfaller<sup>15</sup>

The development of the ARDIA-Net Cross-regional Cooperation Scheme ("AlpsConnect") was a dynamic process that began in November 2019, made up of several practical cross-regional cooperation activities, capacity-building processes and living labs (up to eight) to inform and discuss project ideas in the represented Alpine regions.

The main challenge of the ARDIA-Net project is represented by a persistent funding gap for cross-regional RDI projects within the Alpine Region targeting regional priorities of particular relevance. The main reasons for this funding gap are the lack of cross-regional multi-level governance structures in the implementation of S3 to facilitate cross-regional cooperation.

**AlpsConnect** is based on the ARDIA-Net Modular Framework, which has the following two dimensions:

**1. Need-based approach for implementing cross-regional cooperation as part of the regional S3 and other innovation strategies:** need-based alignment of innovation strategies and their dedicated supporting measures, e.g., funding programmes, to create framework conditions for innovation, growth, and jobs. As a result of this dimension, the third option of AlpsConnect was developed with joint syn-

chronised calls and a coordination office.

**2. Need-based adjustment of complexity in cross-regional cooperation and synchronisation of funding programmes**, because, from an administrative and financial point of view, it is not always necessary and/or possible to synchronise calls and establish a dedicated coordination office.

- At a project level, individual projects can be supported in their cross-regional cooperation plans and by creating synergies between funding programmes. Such cooperation between single projects is described in the first option of AlpsConnect and demands a fitting of available budget and the aims and structure of different funding programmes to create synergies. Another approach is to create synergies between already funded projects (see concept of "**Synergy-Workshop**" down below).
- At a programme level, it is possible to only synchronise the evaluation process of different funding programmes and support funding management authorities with capacity building to evaluate the cross-regional dimension of projects.

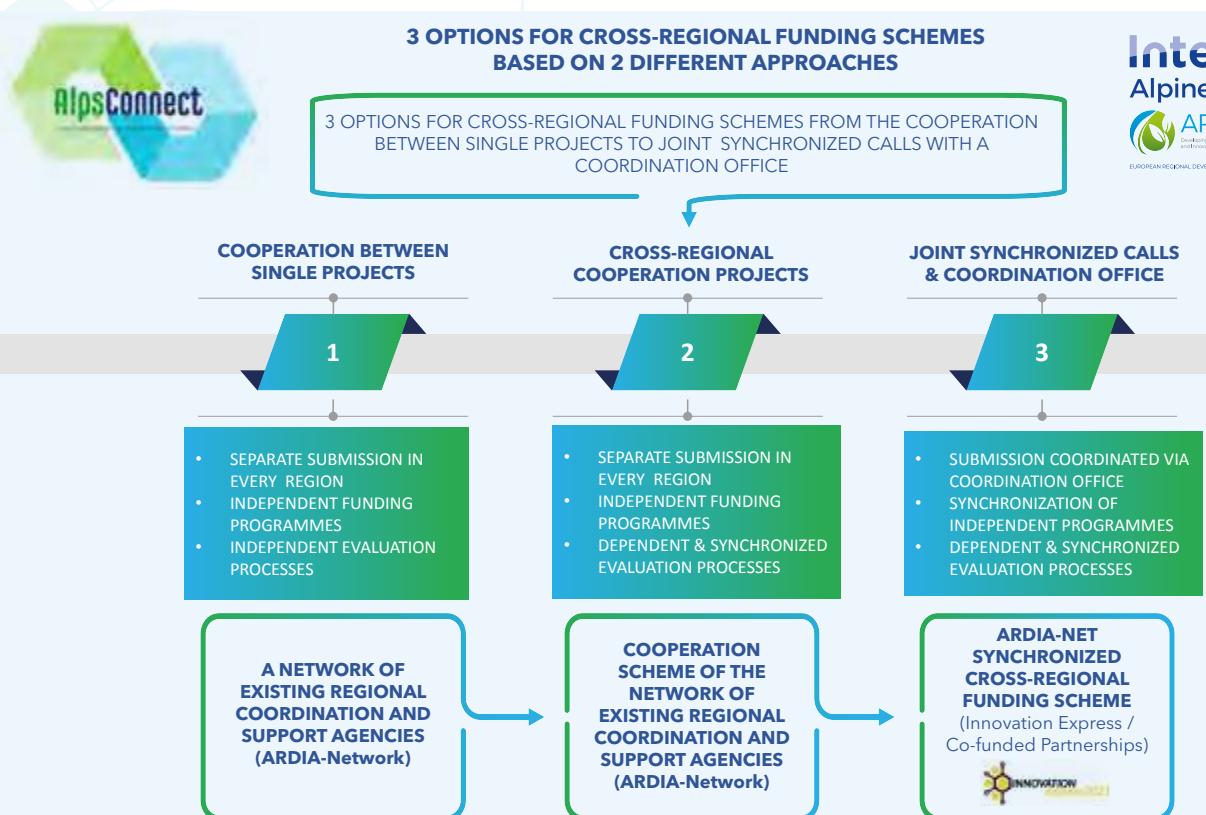


Figure 1: The AlpsConnect Cross-regional Cooperation Scheme developed by ARDIA-Net

This concludes with the creation of the three different options of AlpsConnect with gradually increasing complex cooperative structures. AlpsConnect is based on the synchronisation of existing funding programmes, intended to align public funding mechanisms to allow cross-regional cooperation. This would support the creation of a critical mass of an innovative pool of actors from industry, research, and society in different regions to solve common challenges and gain economic growth, e.g., in the bioeconomy or health economy.

Thus, there is a continuum of options available for coordination, ranging from ad hoc support at the level of individual projects to long-lasting and established cooperation programmes. On this continuum, the ARDIA-Net Cross-regional Cooperation Scheme "AlpsConnect" introduces three pillars as archetypes of coordination options in a need-based, modular approach. The three options are designed to be embedded in multi-level governance structures.

**Option 1** covers the cooperation between single projects. This can be achieved by relying on existing regional strategies and funding programmes and supporting a Network of existing Regional Coordination and Support Agencies (ARDIA-Network). RDI cooperation between potential partners can be developed through network activities and mutual knowledge exchange, initiated "from scratch" or based on already funded project activities. Newly developed RDI cooperation can be supported by submitting independent project proposals to regional funding programmes and its' success will depend on the positive evaluation of the individual applications. After a successful positive evaluation, the independent projects can cooperate during their running time.

In order to strengthen RDI cooperation between regions, ARDIA-Net developed the concept of Synergy Workshops (belonging to this last option). To these workshops, the ARDIA-Network invites RDI projects that are already funded under a similar thematic scope and supported by different funding levels, e.g., regional, national or EU, from different regions of the Alpine Space. The goal of the Synergy Workshops is to maximise the impact of the existing projects and to initiate RDI cooperation, as well as knowledge and innovation exchange between the workshop participants. Finally, the goal is not only to multiply the impact of public investment, but to spark collaborations for future RDI calls between the participating organisations. In order to support regional programme owners and managing authorities, as well as regional actors in their cross-regional RDI cooperation potential, two actions were undertaken:

1. Mapping of regional funding programmes in ARDIA-Net regions performed by the consortium in 2020, including an update of S3 in Lombardy and Upper Austria in 2021. The findings were discussed in detail in the report on "Potential public funding sources at the regional, national, and European level"<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup>

2. Identifying a network of existing regional coordination and support agencies installed by the regional governments to create additional value and synergies for regional RDI actors from industry and academia. With the completion of ARDIA-Net, the so-called ARDIA-Network could play this role

To allow RDI actors from industry and academia to tackle the big scale challenges, transformations, and innovation opportunities, it is important to scale-up regional strategies and corresponding funding programmes. Consequently, **options 2 and 3** of AlpsConnect cover the cross-regional strategic synchronisation of funding programmes, whereas the third option involves the inclusion of a coordination office to create the maximum benefit from cross-regional cooperation.

All measures of AlpsConnect follow the involvement of existing funding programmes and the absence of regional funds moving cross-border. Unlike the first option, where the ARDIA-Network support focuses on potential applicants to create a quasi-cross-regional project, in option 2, the network supports the funding managing authorities and programme owners, as well as applicants.

Option 3 increases the level of coordination in two ways. First, it pushes synchronisation to the level of the calls. Therefore, regions shall issue the same calls for proposals, based on common topics of strategic importance. Second, a coordination office supports the coordination process – forming project consortia, submitting, and evaluating proposals, and funding decisions. However, it is important to note that participating regions remain completely independent in their funding decisions as they participate with existing programmes, according to existing rules and with no funds crossing borders.

The ARDIA-Net consortium has been instrumental in promoting this third option on the European RDI agenda. In autumn 2020, 15 countries and several ARDIA-Net project partners participated in the first meeting to implement a coordinated pilot call across regions. This initiative is described in the next chapter.

<sup>15</sup> BayFOR – Bavarian Research Alliance

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/ardia-net/results/t1-deliverables/d.t1.1.1\\_potential-public-funding-sources-on-regional-national-and-eu-level\\_final-update.pdf](https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/ardia-net/results/t1-deliverables/d.t1.1.1_potential-public-funding-sources-on-regional-national-and-eu-level_final-update.pdf)





## 2.4.2 The Innovation Express 2021 pilot call: putting theory into practice

By Mateja Dermastia and Mateja Novak<sup>17</sup>, Simone Weiß<sup>18</sup>

After an initial meeting in November 2020 set by the PA8 coordinator of the EUSDR<sup>19</sup> (Land Baden-Württemberg) and the coordinator of the Policy Area on Education, Science and Social Affairs of the EUSBSR<sup>20</sup>, several meetings were held in 2021 to motivate and spark the idea of cross-macro-regional cooperation and ensure commitment by programme owners.

ARDIA-Net project partners and four committed regions started with the implementation of the synchronised Innovation Express pilot call in spring 2021. The call was funded by existing regional funding programmes and managed by the participating programme owners and funding agencies of Baden-Württemberg (DE), Brandenburg (DE), Canton of Fribourg (CH) and Land Salzburg (AT). The goal was to initiate, enhance and develop cross-border cooperation among project applicants from participating regions. The Innovation Express 2021 pilot call was designed as a quick response to assist economic recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic and offered SMEs the possibility of widening their markets and developing new products and services with partners across participating regions. This first call was a common approach to support SMEs and RDI organisations in international matchmaking and joint project development in two thematic fields: "Artificial Intelligence in healthcare applications" and "Digital solutions in sustainable industry".

ARDIA-Net partners gave the mandate to Anteja ECG to act as a Secretariat for the call, which, together with the partners, organised several virtual events during May-June 2021 to introduce the pilot call, its procedure, and thematic fields. The highlight was a virtual matchmaking event organised on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021, which allowed participants to create partnerships through scheduled one-to-one meetings that led to concrete project proposals. The dedicated call was open from 17<sup>th</sup> May to 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and resulted in 3 applications, involving 8 applicants from 4 different regions. The ratio of region and type of organisation was as follows: Baden-Württemberg (2 SMEs), Brandenburg (1 RTD), Canton of Fribourg (1 RTD) and Land Salzburg (3 RTD and 1 company).

Additionally, the ARDIA-Net Counselling Board

provided intellectual guidance to the entire implementation process. It showcased successful examples from the Baltic Sea Region and from Baden-Württemberg and provided reflections from the European Commission and EUSALP. Moreover, several meetings of members of the ARDIA-Net Counselling Board took place with policymakers and programme owners at the regional level.

### Key messages on the pilot call

Although the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call represents a comparatively new approach to cross-border cooperation in RDI, the discussions with the representatives of the Alpine regions showed that this approach is feasible, especially for those regions that already have good conditions established. It means that if a macro-strategy is already in place and the macro-strategy has already made links with the operational programmes (e.g., via networks of managing authorities), things can be easier.

The participating regions provided positive feedback and confirmed that the pilot call brought the four regions closer together. There are several reasons for trying to repeat this Innovation Express funding concept and roll it out on a broader basis in the Alpine Space and in other macro-regions:

- It was quite easy to find regions to volunteer
- It brought together new actors from different regions in a simple way, including programme owners
- The preparation of the process was fast and smooth
- It allowed a high level of autonomy for the participating regions regarding the timing and content of the funding schemes
- No modifications of the calls and administrative processes were required
- The approach created new collaboration patterns across regions
- The submitted applications were high quality
- It was SME-friendly, because regional calls were synchronised, and regional funding modalities were applied

<sup>17</sup> Anteja ECG

<sup>18</sup> Innovation Salzburg GmbH

<sup>19</sup> EU Strategy for the Danube Region

<sup>20</sup> EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

- The call Secretariat was provided by ARDIA-Net, which proved to be a good solution to avoid red tape for regional administrators

The active support of ARDIA-Net for the first Innovation Express 2021 call proved to be a success. The project partners were able to test the selected multi-level governance scheme within the pilot call in real life. The insights on how to design and

implement such a call scheme helped the project partners to further fine-tune the multi-level governance scheme. ARDIA-Net partners also initiated the awareness-raising measures to convince new regions to join future Innovation Express calls, e.g., Lombardy and Upper Austria. Follow-up discussions showed significant interest from ARDIA-Net regions in implementing a second Innovation Express call in 2022.

## 2.4.3 Capacity building as key to success: a top-down look at the different approaches

By Iris Reingruber<sup>21</sup>

CAPACITY BUILDING is the key to success, both for the managing authorities of programmes and for the project promoters. The aim is to integrate transnational collaboration within institutions' and organisations' own strategic development. One of the concluding remarks from the dedicated stakeholder session at the EU Macro-regional Strategies Week 2022.<sup>22</sup>

the AlpsConnect cross-regional cooperation scheme (see chapter 2.4.1), and to focus the capacity-building activities on those three options for cross-regional funding schemes. The options range from low complexity in regard of the scheme design to higher complexity, yet also higher impact on the quality of the RDI cooperation.

8 PARTNERS / 7 REGIONS ...	
SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Belong to the same EU macro-region</li><li>▶ Macro-region challenges identified in EUSALP</li><li>▶ Smart Specialisation Strategies</li><li>▶ Believe in the benefit of cross-regional cooperation</li><li>▶ Coordination and support agencies (e.g. clusters organisations) facilitating cross-regional cooperation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ (No) Experience with Innovation Express</li><li>▶ Structure &amp; framework conditions for S3 implementation</li><li>▶ Links and relationships to governmental level and programme owners</li><li>▶ Funding programmes: timeframe of call, available budget, thematic scope</li></ul>

### ... need realistic solutions for different needs ALPSCONNECT - CROSS-REGIONAL COOPERATION SCHEME

**Table 1:** Similarities and differences between the seven ARDIA-Net regions regarding potential for cross-regional cooperation

Since the start of the project, the ARDIA-Net consortium has discussed different approaches on how to bring the ideas of a cross-regional funding scheme to a common ground. It turned out that there is no "one size fits all" solution that can meet the different regional structures, preconditions, and expectations of the Alpine regions.

In order to answer the questions on:

- How to keep it smart and simple
- How to stick to the golden rules: NO new funding programmes, NO new legal frameworks, NO cross-regional transfer of funds
- How best to proceed and to get ready for starting the next steps
- How to develop realistic solutions and for different needs

in December 2020 the ARDIA-Net consortium agreed on the developed modular framework,

At that stage of the project implementation, the ARDIA-Net consortium was already aware that region-specific approaches were needed for capacity building in order to enable regions to set up cross-regional collaborative projects by using existing (regional) funding programmes. The overall task was to implement capacity-building activities to overcome the lack of knowledge on how to facilitate and implement the cross-regional support schemes operationally.

Therefore, ARDIA-Net partners conducted capacity-building activities (e.g., meetings, workshops, or "training") with their stakeholders in their regions to:

- Develop an understanding of AlpsConnect and its three cooperation options
- Never forget the golden rules: NO, NO, NO!
- Identify existing funding programmes for collaborative RDI projects that can accept project partners from abroad without funding them

<sup>21</sup> Business Upper Austria - OÖ Wirtschaftsagentur GmbH

<sup>22</sup> "Fit for synchronising RDI funding programmes: hands-on experiences from Innovation Express and ARDIA-Net" was organised on 10th March 2022

- Discuss/define thematic topics (based on S3) of special interest (particular relevance in the region) and with cooperation potential (e.g., complementary expertise)
- Offer facilitated discussion and exchange with same-level colleagues with similar responsibilities and decision-making authorities
- Offer proactive support of adjustment between policymaking "buddies" beyond the regional border for identification of a "window of opportunity" instead of waiting for any lucky coincidence regarding open regional calls, as

well as topics of common interest

Further capacity-building activities for the development of demonstrator projects were held depending on regional possibilities in order to initiate development of collaborative cross-regional projects.

ARDIA-Net partners submitted 20 reports comprising more than 20 capacity-building activities, assuring interactions with managing authorities and/or project applicants/promotors respectively. These reports are a kind of showcase of the different collaborative approaches developed through the project and its main outputs are listed in the table below.

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES DEPENDING ON THE REGION-SPECIFIC NEEDS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

**TOP-DOWN: STRATEGY AND FUNDING PROGRAMME DRIVEN**

**BOTTOM-UP: PROJECT BASED**

Rationale and intentions of capacity-building activities:

- ▶ Raising awareness / creating mind-set of cross-regional cooperation potential besides standard EU-funded programmes (e.g. Horizon, Interreg)
- ▶ Presentation of cooperation opportunities and promotion of cross-regional partnerships (within the country) and targeting new financing options
- ▶ Exchange with policy and governmental level to promote AlpsConnect; presentation of AlpsConnect in detail in order to create a common understanding on "synchronising funding schemes"
- ▶ Exploring obstacles, barriers and opportunities
- ▶ Exploring the interest of the relevant policymakers and programme owners to synchronise ongoing or upcoming calls
- ▶ Facilitating exchange with experienced Innovation Express participants and external "ambassadors"
- ▶ Bottom-up approach for confirmation of interest & need for cross-regional cooperation in the case of difficult funding situations and hesitant programme owners
- ▶ Exploring the interest of SMEs, universities and RDI organisations to participate in cross-regional cooperation projects
- ▶ Discussing topics, interests and expectations for the region's economy and research areas
- ▶ Connect supply and demand to accelerate innovation on shared priority areas of Smart Specialisation
- ▶ Presenting AlpsConnect to potential candidates for e.g., cross-regional cooperation between single projects (option 1); SMEs looking for cross-regional cooperation

- ▶ Identifying potential regional funding programmes applicable to AlpsConnect
- ▶ Evaluation of cooperation potential between regions in a specific topic
- ▶ Advance towards cross-regional cooperation in a specific option of AlpsConnect
- ▶ Learning by doing: capacity building by participating in the development of the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call (option 3) and later in the project development process
- ▶ Initiation and submission of a joint project by applying the AlpsConnect cross-regional cooperation scheme
- ▶ Understanding the application process and how it is handled in different regions, identifying bottlenecks and challenges in the application of option 2 by performing a “Customer Journey” from project idea to funding decision
- ▶ Applying LSP (Lego Serious Play) for elaborating innovative solutions for cross-regional challenges
- ▶ Information on Innovation Express pilot call, the eligibility criteria, funding process and the regional perspective on the thematic focus of the call
- ▶ B2B meeting for project development within the framework of the Innovation Express 2021

**Table 2:** Top-down and bottom-up approaches related to capacity-building activities implemented by ARDIA-Net in the period 2020-2022

### A Network of Regional Coordination and Support Agencies

Since all regions invest in coordination and support agencies to boost their regional economy and RDI ecosystem, these intermediaries are connected regionally and cross-regionally.

The key role of a Network of Regional Coordination and Support Agencies is to be the coordinator and driver for:

- Continuous awareness raising (facilitator & caretaker)
- Promotion of the idea of synchronising regional funding programmes to two different groups: the group of programme owners and funding agencies (the administrative/governmental

level responsible for designing, publishing, funding and/or managing calls); and the group of project applicants, e.g., entrepreneurs and SMEs, intermediaries, business support organisations, R&D (university/non-university) and NGOs

- Supporting the three options of AlpsConnect

In a nutshell, in parallel to the support given by a call Secretariat (see chapter 2.4.2), a network of this kind would play an essential role facilitating any of the options of the AlpsConnect scheme. That was already proven during the ARDIA-Net project, but it could be a mid-term outcome after the end of the project, insofar as managing authorities and funding agencies from the Alpine regions are interested in promoting this network.

## 2.4.4 Lessons learnt from AlpsConnect cross-regional cooperation scheme

By Simone Weiß<sup>23</sup> and Iris Reingruber<sup>24</sup>

AlpsConnect is a good opportunity to collaborate trans-regionally and -nationally, thereby facilitating connections and developing cooperation between RDI environments across the Alpine Space. By participating in the AlpsConnect scheme (Chapter 2.4.1), participants get the opportunity to find new (inter-)national contacts and cooperation partners in the Alpine Space and promote more resilient value chains.

Regarding **option 1** - the cooperation between single projects - it became clear that it is a new and innovative way to initiate cross-regional cooperation without regional funding programmes that allow cross-regional cooperation. Of course, it is quite challenging to find the perfect alignment of available cooperation partners in other regions, funding programmes in all the regions involved that fit the joint project idea, and the right timing for all partners involved in terms of project calls and submission deadlines. A learning outcome from this experience is that we expect that concentrating on already funded projects will be more successful in order to generate synergetic activities between them.

For regions with a tradition in cooperation and a trusting way of working with each other, **option 2** - cross-regional cooperation projects - offers a good opportunity to collaborate. First, a mindset shift may be needed to move away from the ambitious attempt to unify the funding programmes and move towards an application process adjusted with the programme owners and facilitated by the regional coordination and support agencies. Therefore, for a common understanding of the application process in the ARDIA-participating

regions and an identification of its bottlenecks, a "Customer Journey from the project idea to the funding decision" was implemented with the programme owners in three Austrian regions (Land Salzburg, Lower and Upper Austria). Subsequently a project factsheet was developed to inform the participating regions that there is a cross-regional project idea in development and to ask the responsible facilitators to support their local project applicants in terms of regional funding and application.

**Option 3** covers the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call, which was supported by a call Secretariat who organised the operational steps within the call (e.g., preparation of the necessary call documents, provision of the necessary call tools and promotion of the call, provision of a process for submission of proposals, etc.). A common understanding of the responsibilities of the call Secretariat must be defined in advance. An online matchmaking platform as a tool for finding potential project partners has proven to be very helpful. Virtual matchmaking events were organised to facilitate cross-regional joint projects. An attractive aspect of this option was the fast process flow from project submission to project funding. However, communication is key - this applies to the applicants, the regional coordination and support agencies, as well as the funding agencies. Regular online meetings to exchange information between the main actors in the process are essential. The generation of know-how and the initiation of longer-term research and innovation cooperation are also another important aspect of Innovation Express 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Innovation Salzburg GmbH

<sup>24</sup> Business Upper Austria - OÖ Wirtschaftsagentur GmbH

### 3. Long-term impact for the multi-level governance of the Alpine RDI area

By Sergi Costa and Vanessa Kelsch<sup>25</sup>, Melissa Balzarotti<sup>26</sup>

#### 3.1 In the quest for a multi-level governance for the Alpine RDI area

Multi-level governance, as defined by the Committee of the Regions<sup>27</sup>, applies to coordinated actions by the EU, its member states and local and sub-national governments, based on and involving partnership and institutional cooperation at all levels of the policy cycle, from the elaboration to the implementation of measures. This type of governance refers to the dispersion of central governments, both vertically, which concerns actors located at different territorial and administrative levels, and horizontally, actors and sectors at the same level of government.

Since 2015 the existence of the EUSALP has laid bare the considerable potential of a joint approach to strengthening innovation and competitiveness based on macro-regional complementarities, as described by Michael Keller in chapter 1. Nonetheless, it is rare to find examples where such common innovation challenges specific to the Alpine macro-region (e.g., sustainability and bioeconomy) have led to concrete cross-regional actions.

The outputs of ARDIA-Net contributed largely to the idea of sharing experiences of transnational governance. There were multiple meetings and events with the regional administration aimed at moving towards this goal, which occasionally involved inter-ministerial collaboration.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the active role of three partners (HES-SO, BayFOR and Land Salzburg) in the respective EUSALP AG1 and AG2 fora paved the way to regularly embed the findings of the project in policy discussions related to the strategy. The active participation of Anders Bergström (Policy Area coordinator of the EUSBSR) and Dr. Judit Schrick-Szenczi (Priority Area coordinator of the EUSDR), as members of the Counselling Board and invited speakers to the events, was remarkable for the pursuit of multi-level governance. Experiences, such as the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call, resulted in cross-macro-regional action, which further supports the vision of multi-level governance as driven by DG REGIO.

Several policy instruments were developed, informed, and displayed by ARDIA-Net. So far they have contributed to three of the project's communication objectives to a large extent:

##### Changing behaviour

Aim: Developing a coherent strategy for common governance

Three policy memos were published through the project as food for thought regarding new ways of using part of the Cohesion Policy funds for cross-regional cooperation. The new batch of regional S4+ in the Alpine macro-region (programming period 2021-27) should facilitate this behavioural change too, since there is a renewed impetus for inter-strategic work.

Major events, such as the Capacity Building event in June and the Policy Forum in November 2021, were designed and programmed with this communication objective in mind. Bilateral and multi-lateral meetings with programme owners, business support organisations and project partners seconded this idea. The AlpsConnect scheme and the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call drafted practical guidance on how programme owners and funding agencies could make this work from an operational perspective. Moreover, three Alpine regions (Baden-Württemberg, Canton of Fribourg and Land Salzburg) were involved in the pilot call and two more received coaching to raise interest in a future second call.

Whereas a roadmap and an action plan for the establishment of a durable ARDIA-Network has been developed, a specific strategy has not been drafted, since it was difficult to align the different levels of commitment of the participating regions over the course of the project. There was a mix of frontrunner regions, while other regions demonstrated a lack of maturity to definitively move forward. Indeed, four out of seven regions show potential for future joint calls at the date of writing. Complementarily, an Interreg Alpine Space project (AlpLinkBioEco) has already worked out a strategy<sup>29</sup>, in which recommendations IV, V and VI are extremely aligned with the work done by ARDIA-Net and the results delivered.

Beyond the delivery of certain strategic elements, ARDIA-Net reached out to offer a blueprint (please see the next subchapter) and a pilot call (a designed multi-level governance scheme ap-

<sup>25</sup> BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg GmbH, Lead Partner

<sup>26</sup> Lombardy Green Chemistry Association

<sup>27</sup> The European Union Committee of the Regions (2009), White Paper on Multi-level Governance

<sup>28</sup> An example in Baden-Württemberg: <https://2021-27.efre-bw.de/foerderaufruf/prototypenfoerderung-fuer-innovative-technologien/>

<sup>29</sup> Costa, S., Dermastia, M. (2021), Joint Masterplan on circular bioeconomy

plied in practice) that shows that synchronisation is not that difficult on the operational side. It also concluded that a call Secretariat (coordination

office) should be considered, since it would free up the regional administration from red tape and provide technical assistance.



**Christian Altmann** / Head of Cluster and Cooperation at Business Upper Austria, AT

With AlpsConnect, our cross-regional cooperation scheme developed by ARDIA-Net together with business agencies and regional funding bodies, we are able to bring many declarations of intent and previously unused cooperation potential to life. Project consortia are addressing a much larger scope: working together with other partners from different regions and opening to partnerships with institutions and competencies that are not sufficiently available in a particular region. So, let's open the cooperation potential within our regions with AlpsConnect.

**Anders Bergström** / Policy Area Coordinator for Education, Science and Social Affairs at the EUSBSR / Norden Association, SE

ARDIA-Net has contributed to a mindset shift among stakeholders, from a pre-dominating country/regional-centric mindset to a macro-regional one. A mindset where one acknowledges the need for international collaboration for the development of targeted solutions to address one's challenges.



### Influencing attitude

Aim: Developing a blueprint for a synchronised S3 RDI funding scheme

The blueprint for a cross-regional Alpine Space RDI funding scheme aims at making effective use of the potential of regional strategies to foster innovation, economic growth, and job creation in the domains of the bioeconomy and health economy. Alongside the blueprint, an extra factsheet compelling the AlpsConnect scheme, and its need-based modular framework is available.<sup>30</sup> These policy instrumen-

ts could be replicable in other EU macro-regions.

Eight Living Labs were organised at the regional level (1 x Baden-Württemberg, 1 x Bavaria, 1 x Canton of Fribourg, 3 x Lombardy and 1 x Upper Austria, including participants from Land Salzburg and Lower Austria). On the other hand, bilateral talks in two regions (Lombardy and Upper Austria), facilitated by the call Secretariat of the Innovation Express and an external facilitator with experience in the design of joint calls, attempted to influence attitudes and raise interest in future calls.



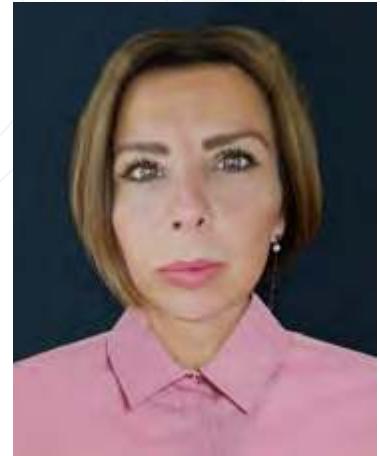
**Anders Bergström** / Policy Area Coordinator for Education, Science and Social Affairs at the EUSBSR / Norden Association, SE

The expanded mindset allows stakeholders to consider other project partners than their usual ones, to see competences with potential partners in other countries, and to invite them to join forces in co-creating solutions.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/ardia-net/results/press-release/factsheet-ardia-net-rev3.pdf>

**Maria Vittoria Frau** / Former Research & Innovation Affairs Officer, Brussels Delegation of the Lombardy Region, IT

In Lombardy we consider the synchronisation of a cross-regional funding scheme a strategic way to overcome boundaries and ensure greater impact for our actions by joining efforts and resources with other European regions that share the same goals. Concerning the bioeconomy sector, the development of interregional collaborative projects based on this approach could surely foster more sustainable production models.



**Katharina Lenz** / Pillar Officer at the Danube Strategy Point, AT

Post-2020 programming provides a unique opportunity for all European Structural and Investment Funds and other funds, such as IPA<sup>31</sup> and NDICI<sup>32</sup>, to address territorial challenges in macro-regional strategies in a more targeted and comprehensive way. For macro-regional strategies it is also an opportunity to better understand the needs and approaches of the programmes and provide a translation of the strategies towards funding. Through these collaborative workshops in the ARDIA-Net project, the will to work together and trust among the multi-level stakeholders has been strengthened significantly - also in the Danube Region Strategy.

**Ilze Ciganska** / Project manager for the support of EU macro-regional strategies and innovative cooperation methods within the ESIF, Interact Programme, EU

Regions in Europe are facing challenges that know no borders. At the same time, there is a greater push for the more efficient use of available funding to drive forward change in Europe. Increased interdependencies require more coordinated investments and alternative cooperation solutions that go beyond the Interreg Programme framework. ARDIA-Net partners have worked on practical approaches, challenging traditional fund management perspectives, and demonstrated that cooperation is possible.



### **Increasing knowledge**

Aim: Consolidating capacities for implementing demonstration calls and projects at the cross-regional level

Practical guidance, specific knowledge and lessons learnt have been disseminated by ARDIA-Net partners through bi-lateral meetings, capacity-building events, and communication activities. The ultimate goal was to increase understanding on approaches to cross-regional cooperation and, eventually, to facilitate demonstration actions between two or three AR-

DIA-Net regions. The frontrunners, Baden-Württemberg, Canton of Fribourg, and Land Salzburg, decided to do it for real. Three applications were received, and one-and-a-half projects were funded via the Innovation Express 2021. Three RTD organisations and one SME were funded to run projects with the following titles: "Artificial Intelligence-based identification of long COVID-related diagnostic pathways" and "Digital solutions to support the development of sustainable food and natural cosmetics value chains".

Multiple outreach events, such as the Interreg Alpine Space Kick Off Conference in November

<sup>31</sup> Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

<sup>32</sup> Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument

2021 and two stakeholder sessions during the EU Macro-Regional Strategies Week in March 2022, reached up to 350 organisations. That resulted in reaching out to national and regional managing authorities of the four EU macro-regions (including the Danube Strategy Point), desk officers of EU programmes (Interact, Interreg ADRION), EUSALP officers (mainly AG1 and AG2), and a loyal group of up to six observers that followed the project regularly. RTD organisations, universities, cluster ma-

nagers and SMEs were also reached via the matchmaking event of the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call (45 registrations), and as participants of the Alpine Space Kick-Off Conference.

Finally, the involvement of DG REGIO (David Matzek-Lichtenstein, Unit D.1) on the Counselling Board assured a certain degree of cross-fertilisation between the macro-regional approach (EUSALP) and the operational part of the Interreg Programme.



**Bernhard Lehofer** / Head of Administration and Finance, Innovation Salzburg GmbH, AT

*Sometimes you do not have the expertise you need for developing projects in the area, in the region and even in the country, so you must go cross-border. It's very useful if there are synchronised funding schemes available because they allow for common projects to be established between research organisations and SMEs. With the Innovation Express 2021, we had the possibility to implement extremely interesting projects with Baden-Württemberg. In my experience, it represented an extraordinarily useful tool for synchronising funding schemes.*

#### **Katharina Lenz** / Pillar Officer at the Danube Strategy Point, AT

Previous experiences show that dialogue between programming authorities and key implementers of macro-regional strategies is needed to make the best use of EU funding sources and that better coordination may require going beyond traditional administrative boundaries. The different instruments developed and presented in the ARDIA-Net project also help the EU Strategy for the Danube Region to strengthen cooperation and coordination of actions in the multi-level governance system and to achieve common goals and reinforce cross-macro-regional synergies.



**Dr. Judit Schrick-Szenczi** / Priority Area coordinator EUSDR; Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour, and Tourism Baden-Württemberg, DE

*The launch of the first synchronised Innovation Express pilot call in May 2021 represented a very important step for the involved regions, acting as pioneers that could show how independent funding schemes could be harmonised and synchronised. The regions had the possibility to include national, regional, or even European funds. We are extremely grateful because the Interreg Alpine Space Programme helped us to come closer to the goals and the ARDIA-Net project enabled us to manage the call from an administrative and qualitative perspective.*

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/s3-4alpclusters/en/home>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/a-ring/en/home>

## 3.2 Outreach in numbers

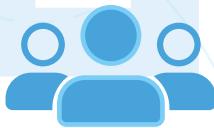
ARDIA-Net was an immense collaborative effort. In line with the intended capitalisation of the results common to the Interreg Programme, the project exploited some findings and methodologies of the previous S3-4AlpClusters project<sup>33</sup> and closely followed the progress of the projects A-RING<sup>34</sup> and AlpGov 2 that ran at the same time, both of which contributed to programme priority 4 (Well-Governed Alpine Space). It established contacts and synergies with desk and policy officers of several Eu-

ropean institutions and programmes. Through the activities of the project, four European macro-regions were reached. The subcontractor VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH, with long-standing experience in public funding management, contributed as a representative on the Counselling Board and as advisor in some tasks.

The outreach of ARDIA-Net is summarised in the following infographics:

### PEOPLE

**8**  
Partners



**5**  
Countries



**7**  
Alpine regions



**12**  
Observers



**1**  
Multi-level  
expert group



**>70**  
Public bodies

**>75**  
Business  
support  
organisations,  
SMEs, and  
enterprises



**>50**  
Higher  
education  
and research  
entities



**275**  
Followers  
on LinkedIn

## EVENTS & DOCUMENTS



**8**  
Living  
Labs



**1**  
Cross-regional  
Cooperation  
Scheme:  
AlpsConnect



**1**  
Pilot call:  
Innovation  
Express 2021



**1**  
Panel discussion  
in the Interreg  
Alpine Space  
Kick-Off  
Conference 2021



**1**  
Stakeholder  
session in the EU  
Macro-Regional  
Strategies  
Week 2022



**20**  
Capacity  
building  
activities



**1**  
Policy  
forum



**3**  
Policy  
memos



**1**  
Blueprint



**24**  
Press  
releases



**2**  
Videos

### 3.3 Final reflections on the addressed challenges

**Challenge 1:** There is a persistent funding gap for Alpine Space cross-regional research, development and innovation projects targeting S3 opportunities of particular relevance and including actors of new value chains, from research to market

ARDIA-Net was implemented during the transition phase of two programming periods, ending up in the programming period 2021-27, in which a new batch of S3 (re-named as S4+) were published. The regional S3 preferences that guided the project in its origins belonged to the previous period when the proposal was prepared (2019). The presentation of the European Green Deal and the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the timeliness of both topics even more.

ARDIA-Net paved the way to reduce the funding gap in some of the participating regions. Nonetheless, as frequently happens in territorial cooperation, the limited number of experiences and practices currently available make it difficult to close the gap. Whereas there are only a few examples of cross-regional cooperation based in S3 and particularly in the bioeconomy, such as the Vanguard Initiative (2013) and its Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P) on the bioeconomy which has run since 2016, more good practices are needed. In the latter case, seven Alpine regions are participating in the initiative (Autonomous Province of Trento, Lombardy, Lower Austria, Piedmont, Slovenia, South Tyrol, and Upper Austria) but geographically it is not limited to the Alpine Space. There are also previous attempts of funding process synchronisation that failed due to legal regional funding guidelines, which could not be unified.

The cooperation schemes developed through ARDIA-Net (please see AlpsConnect in chapter 2.4.1) strove to put the regions in the driving seat of the design of those approaches. In the case of the Innovation Express 2021 pilot call, the regional administrators were able to determine the funding priorities, the beneficiaries, the timing of the call and the duration of the projects themselves, among other features. This represented a rapid reaction to pandemic issues too.

**Challenge 2:** ARDIA-Net should result in an increased institutional capacity to address common challenges in the Alpine Space

Implementing a multi-level governance system is always a collaborative effort, due to the lack of

specific experiences, besides the geographically wider approach of the Vanguard Initiative and previous experiences in the Baltic Sea Region. The rationale behind the work done by ARDIA-Net partners was to design a scheme that would require less effort to be implemented and maintained; this is key to foster a better chance of it being adopted. On top of this, insofar as the funding decisions could be taken by the regions and funds would not cross borders, the potential of multi-level governance as an opportunity would be secured.

ARDIA-Net delivered a demonstrated methodology on how to design calls that foster cross-border collaboration; therefore, this documentation is ready to be used by regional funding authorities. The documentation refers to a call named 'PAN-ALPS'<sup>36</sup>. Bearing in mind that a sufficient level of skill and competence for the management of cooperation projects should be ensured, project partners arranged bilateral meetings and public events to explain how these calls could work from the operational side. This entire process finally crystallised in the form of the Innovation Express<sup>37</sup> pilot call.

ARDIA-Net collated knowledge and good practices from the Baltic Sea Region, but also kept a close eye on transnational cooperation financed by Horizon 2020 and FP7, and particularly on initiatives, such as ERA-Net, which focus on research and development but have a definitively wider national approach. It also reconfirmed that advanced regions in which the macro-regional strategy has already made a link with the operational programmes (e.g., via networks of managing authorities) have a competitive advantage, as some previous experiences in the Baltic Sea Region have already demonstrated.<sup>38</sup>

**Challenge 3:** To set up a Network of Regional Coordination and Support Agencies (ARDIA-Network)

Setting the scene is important, which means providing support for the partner search and dedicating financial and human resources adapted to the ambition defined for such cooperation approaches.

Previous experiences in the Baltic Sea Region show in practice how a network of managing authorities could work, as in the case of the Baltic Sea Network – European Social Fund (BSN-ESF). In ARDIA-Net, this approach could not be completed

due to the different readiness levels of the participating regional administrations. Nonetheless, the expertise of the ARDIA-Network remains available after project end and should be considered an integral part of a wider consolidated multi-level governance scheme. The ARDIA-Network can identify and promote future RDI cooperation, and administrate matchmaking platforms, as well as facilitate contacts within and with other regions.

One of the concluding remarks is that an Alpine network of managing authorities, à la Baltic Sea Network, could be a promising option to continuously exchange information about ongoing and upcoming funding programmes that can be subject to synchronisation. Such a network could help to exchange information and knowledge about good funding practices, and how to improve the collaborative modalities to be implemented. DG REGIO is already working in this direction, by setting up thematic financial dialogue networks, as written by David Matzek-Lichtenstein in his foreword. This would be a smart progress aligned to the ARDIA-Net findings.

#### **Challenge 4:** Replicating the experience of Innovation Express 2021

The pilot call in 2021 was living proof that cross-regional cooperation is possible, but how best to roll out the Innovation Express approach on a broader basis in the Alpine Space in the future, as well as how to transfer it to other macro-regions?

Indeed, the final answer to this question remains on the side of regional programme owners as it was already before starting ARDIA-Net. Nonetheless, the legal framework is now more advantageous. As described in chapter 2.3. there are some legal levers in the Common Provisions Regulation of the EU Cohesion Policy that should facilitate cross-regional work in a decisive way during the new programming period. Additionally, funding mechanisms, such as the recent allocation of EU Recovery Funds to the member states as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, could contribute to the replication effect of ARDIA-Net results in the particularly hard-hit macro-regions. Moreover, David Matzek-Lichtenstein underlined the importance of the “perfect timing” of the project to settle some ongoing processes related to challenges and the chance of transition in the Alpine Region during the ARDIA-Net Final Conference on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022 in Milan.

Finally, according to the inspiring concluding remarks of Tanja Tobanelli (Land Salzburg; Observer) at the same event, further progress in the direction set by ARDIA-Net and previous initiatives should be just a matter of sensitivity and open-minded attitude. After taking an active part in the pilot call, she highlighted the importance of a decentralised model that is faster in a way, where money remains in the regions, but is open to projects with new partners beyond borders. As coined by her “it is like cooking together, but each with their own ingredients”.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.alpine-region.eu/projects/alpgov-2>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/ardia-net/en/project-results/t3.-establishment-of-a-durable-ardia-network/templates-for-the-implementation-of-a-rdi-joint-call>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/ardia-net/results/t3-deliverables/3.2.3-multi-level-funding-scheme-governance-design.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Costa, S., Kelsch, V. (2022) *Lessons learnt from cross-regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region: reflections of an expert*

## 4. Acknowledgements

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Yet most importantly, our recognition goes to our skilled consortium and active observers, everyone who worked on the project’s deliverables and activities during the last thirty-three months. We started pre-pandemic and we finish (so, it seems) post-pandemic: all in all, a real journey.

Stuttgart, in June 2022

PROJECT PARTNERS	OBSERVERS
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Table 3: Project partners and Observers of ARDIA-Net (2019-2022)

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# Interreg Alpine Space



EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND



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