

O.T3.1

BE-READI Alps Strategic Roadmap for Alpine Space competitiveness

A political declaration including the results of the Open Tables' discussion and a set of proposals to be implemented at a macroregional level

June 2022

WPT3 - Alpine Space is READI - Austria Wirtschaftsservice



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Introduction

This document is the BE-READI Alps Strategic Roadmap for Alpine Space competitiveness – a political declaration including the results of the Open Tables’ discussion and a set of proposals to be implemented at a macroregional level.

In the Alpine Space area, traditional and mature SMEs are very dominant and represent the economic backbone of the Alpine Space area. At the same time there are also many start-ups in the Alpine Space area, but they lack experience. The BE-READI Alps project has tried to make an impact by supporting mature SMEs in starting a »second life«, through numerous activities.

Within the BE-READI Alps project several services were tested for SMEs. A BE-READI Journey was set up and piloted with more than 160 companies that were assessed and supported to launch their journey, creating connections and partnership at Alpine Space level.

The pilot phase was a good opportunity not only to test the methodologies and the BE-READI services but also to understand better the need of mature companies, the possible solutions available at Alpine Space area and to raise a debate among stakeholders and decision makers.



The BE-READI Policy Dialogue

The main topics emerged in the BE-READI ALP were in fact translated into the format of »Policy Dialogue« that were launched throughout the project life to deepen the topic of funding, digitalization, green transition, and Alpine Space cooperation.

In policy dialogue were involved stakeholders representing the quadruple helix (businesses, research, policy makers and society) trying to also mix representatives at regional, national and European level. The outcomes of these discussions are included in the BE-READI ALPS Whitepaper (enclosed as Annex) and condensed in this document in proposals that the Alpine Space stakeholders are asked to translate in policy actions. The Strategic Roadmap for Alpine Space Competitiveness was launched during the project final conference.

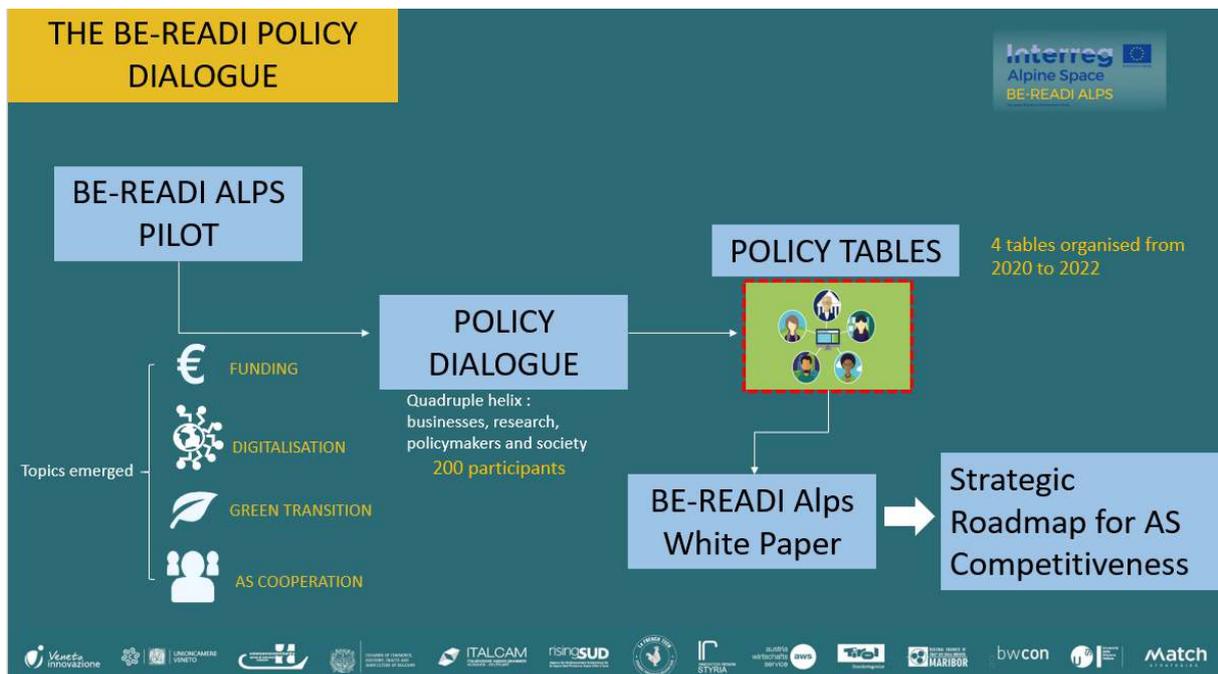


Figure: the BE-READI Policy Dialogue

Within the BE-READI Alps project four Policy Tables took place from 2020 until 2022. The topics those policy dialogues focussed on were:

- Policy Table #1: Access to Finance in Alpine Space
- Policy Table #2: How can digitalisation boost mature SMEs in launching their second life project?



- Policy Table #3: How to fund innovative projects in European SMEs?
- Policy Table #4: Toward a Green Transition – An ecosystem ready to boost the business resilience.

Within these Policy Tables numerous experts, policy makers, business support organisations and business representatives gave their insights on the previously named topics. The discussions aimed at launching a shared and operative Strategic Roadmap for Alpine Space Competitiveness to overcome the current barriers that prevent the Alpine Space innovation ecosystem upscale.

Stakeholders and Decision Makers at Policy Tables and Final Conference

Policy Table no. 1 – “Access to Finance: how to boost the competitiveness of innovative SMEs”

March 5, 2020 (written contributions because the event was cancelled at the beginning of the Covid pandemic)

- Luca Filippi, Deputy Secretary CCIAA Bolzano
- Maria Sole D’Orazio, LP BE-READI ALPS - Veneto Innovazione spa
- Michael Keller, Applied R&D Service / HES-SO Fribourg / School of Engineering and Architecture
- Armando Melone, European Commission - DG Grow H3
- Christina Koch, Head of EU-Coordination Unit at Austria Wirtschaftsservice

Policy Table no. 2 – „How digitalization can boost mature SMEs in launching their second life project“

Oct. 7, 2020 in Ljubljana/online

- Aleš Pulko, President of Regional Chamber of Craft and Small Business Maribor
- Maria Sole D’Orazio, LP BE-READI ALPS -Veneto Innovazione spa
- Michael Keller, Applied R&D Service / HES-SO Fribourg / School of Engineering and Architecture
- Alenka Marovt, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of Slovenia
- Danijel Lampereger, Craft and Small Business of Slovenia
- Ziga Bahovec, European Commission - Directorate-General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology



- Tomaz Kokot, owner of FlawlessCode
- Eleonora di Maria, Full Professor of Business Management at University of Padova
- Mathilde Mauvais, innovation project manager at risingSUD

Policy Table no. 3 – „How to fund innovative projects in European SMEs?“

May 11, 2021 in Marseille/online

- Jean-Francois Royer, General Manager risingSUD
- Maria Sole D’Orazio, LP BE-READI ALPS -Veneto Innovazione spa
- Michael Keller, Applied R&D Service / HES-SO Fribourg / School of Engineering and Architecture
- Nolwenn Simonot, International and Europe Key Account Manager, BpiFrance
- Christian Dubarry, Head of European Affairs, BpiFrance
- Stefan Fischer, Swiss Federal Officer Euresearch, Swiss National Contact Point for SMEs
- Steven Frigerio, National Contact Point European Innovation Council, APRE, Horizon Europe
- Natalia Garcia Mozo, Head of unit SMEs Advisory Services, Bavarian Research Alliance GmbH
- Martin Walch, EUREKA Program Coordinator, FFG
- Valerie Roche Melin, General Secretary, Region Sud Investissement
- Alessandra Baldan, Veneto Sviluppo – Incentives and Credits Area
- Michael Kerschbaumer, Project Manager Innovation, SFG
- Marco Rampin, Veneto Sviluppo – Incentives and Credits Area
- Arndt Upfold, Deputy Head of Unit Start-ups and Business Transfer, Ministry of Economics, Labour and Housing Baden-Württemberg



Policy Table no. 4 – „Toward the green transition – An ecosystem ready to boost the business resilience“

March 24, 2022 in Venice/online

- Santo Romano, Director Economic Policies, Human Capital and Community Planning Area, Veneto Region
- Roberto Marcato, Councillor for Economic Development and Energy, Veneto Region
- Mirko Bisesti, Councillor for Education, University and Culture, Autonomous Province of Trento
- David Matzek-Lichtenstein, Planning and Programming Officer – Macroregional Strategies and Post2020 Programming, DG Regio – European Commission
- Maria Sole D’Orazio, LP BE-READI ALPS -Veneto Innovazione spa
- Michael Keller, Applied R&D Service / HES-SO Fribourg / School of Engineering and Architecture
- Anna Giorgi, Director of UNIMONT University of Milan and EUSALP AG1 Team Leader
- Bernhard Kölmel, Professor Global Process Management, School of Engineering, Pforzheim University
- Birgit Weihs-Dopfer, Cluster Manager Renewable Energies Tyrol, Standortagentur Tirol GmbH
- Jennifer Cassingena Harper, EU Commission High Level Expert
- Achille Spinelli, Councillor for the Economic Development, Research and Labour, Autonomous Province of Trento
- Judit Schrick-Szenczi, Ministry for Economic Affairs, Labour and Tourism Baden-Württemberg
- Rita Steffanutto, Director of the Research, Innovation and Energy Directorate, Veneto Region
- Filippo Dadone, Deputy Director of the Environment and Climate Directorate General, Lombardy Region



BE-READI ALPS Final Conference

May 5, 2022 in Vienna

- Maria Sole D’Orazio, LP BE-READI ALPS -Veneto Innovazione spa
- Luca Filippi, Deputy Secretary CCIAA Bolzano
- Mathilde Mauvais, innovation project manager at risingSUD
- Christina Koch, Austria Wirtschaftsservice
- Aleš Pulko, President of Regional Chamber of Craft and Small Business Maribor
- Alenka Marovt, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of Slovenia
- Leopold Strobl, Chamber of Commerce of Graz/Austria
- Dusan Todorovic, Head of aws Industry-Startup.Net at Austria Wirtschaftsservice
- Umberto Bondi, Senior Project Manager and Coach at USI (Università della Svizzera Italiana) Startup Centre



Set of proposals to be implemented at macroregional level

The Strategic Roadmap shall give some hints on how to overcome the current barriers that prevent the Alpine Space innovation ecosystem to upscale. It is there to foster joint actions and agreements toward a harmonised cooperation among Alpine Space regions.

The Roadmap can be seen as a political declaration including the results of the Policy Tables' discussions and a set of proposals to be implemented at macroregional level.

Policy Table #1: Access to Finance in the Alpine Space area

Within the first Policy Table on "Access to Finance" the participants were given an overview on examples and good practices from the Alpine Space regions South Tyrol and Austria in order to support SMEs to get a better access on finance. Both regions have put a focus on stimulating intersectoral collaboration in order to boost the overall economy and could show some of the positive effects those programmes have already had in the past.

The Policy Table started with an introduction to activities of A2F in South Tyrol by Luca Filippi, Deputy Secretary-General at the Chamber of Commerce Bolzano, followed by an insight to the EU perspective for the new phase. Armando Melone gave a very current input on how the European Commission is committed to solving the issue of access to finance for SMEs, especially now with the COVID-19 crisis effecting European SMEs quite negatively. He lists all the different EU-programmes where there will be financial instruments available for European SMEs.

Christina Koch gave examples access to finance funding programs of Austria: Kreativwirtschaftsscheck (Creative Industries Voucher) and the Creat(iv)e Solutions Program. Both of those funding programs were quite successful in supporting SMEs directly through enhancing cooperation with innovation drivers like creative industries.

It is crucial, especially under the current circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis, to support SMEs in the Alpine Space area through access to finance in various ways, in order for them to survive and to maintain the competitiveness of the Alpine Space economy.





The following Challenges and Solutions were found within this discussion

Challenges 	Solutions 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank lending is the most common source of finance for European SMEs, according to the latest SME Access to Finance Survey conducted by the European Commission and the European Central Bank while alternative financing is still a niche market. • Financing gaps exist and the COVID-19 situation has exacerbated the issues. • Still relevant percentage of SMEs who applied for bank financing did not receive the financing they had planned for. • Many SMEs are not ready to face private investors. • Typical investors complain that they are not interested in small investments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost public initiatives to manage financial facilitation and grant facilitating loans. • Combining private funding with public funding schemes accessible to SMEs. • Voucher schemes to cover specific steps of the companies' process (e.g., partnership with start-ups to boost digitalization/partnership with creatives industries to support the ideas generation...) • There is the need for a funding programme to make companies ready, so that they become able to face potential investors, even co-invest with private investors and share the risk with them. • Combining small investors in a larger structure to enlarge private funding opportunities. • Support initiative to combine small individual innovative SME projects into larger structures interesting for private equity investors.



Policy Table #2: How can digitalisation boost mature SMEs in launching their second life project?

How can digitalisation boost mature SMEs in launching their second life project? Digitalisation is without doubt one of the most frequently mentioned aspects of SMEs' transformation processes. Success stories related to digitalisation are abundant and in a certain sense one could come to believe that the second life of mature SMEs lies often only a click away. And indeed, there are examples in which digitalization appears to be the natural evolution for a business to grow spontaneously into new opportunities. But as with all transformation processes, opportunities from digitalisation behave a bit like icebergs. There is a tip of the opportunity visible to everyone, laying open in the sea for businesses to tap into. But the big bulk of the transformation potential remains underwater, hidden behind waves of challenges and market failures of all sorts. In short, while there might be cases in which the opportunities from digitalisation naturally and spontaneously lead to a second life for mature SMEs, in most of the cases this road is paved with stumbling blocks requiring smart strategies to make the opportunity available on a wider scale. This is what we designate by "policy interventions". It is nevertheless important to note, that policies are understood in a broader sense than simply as state support. They include the complete set of solutions that can be identified to overcome identified challenges. A strategic approach to identifying opportunities, challenges and required solutions, at the level of all involved actors, public and private, is what we could call a typical policy development process.

In order to maximize the opportunities at hand, to reveal as much as possible of the metaphorical iceberg such a policy development process needs to be interactive and rely on a participation of actors from the quadruple helix – businesses, research, policymakers and society. Moreover, it needs to benefit from mutual learning interactions. Challenges are often shared across different regions. And only in an open policy dialogue can successful solutions be multiplied. This is precisely what the series of policy tables of the BE-READI ALPS project aims at. Its Advisory Board, composed of the Observers of the project, constitutes the frame for cross-regional exchange on opportunities, challenges and solutions – to start with digitalisation as a first concrete topic identified as key in the second life projects of mature SMEs in the Alpine Space.

The characteristics of a fruitful policy development process also give this paper its shape: a collection of contributions aimed at mutual learning in a policy dialogue and addressing the opportunity digitalisation represents on the way to a second life for mature SMEs, from the perspective of diverse actors of the quadruple helix.



The cases presented and discussed during the policy table provide an interesting portfolio of identified challenges and solutions in using digitalisation to boost mature SMEs in launching their second life projects.

Slovenia provided an interesting case study of dedicated support for digitalisation and digital transformation. The success of the programme was significantly associated with a need-based and bottom-up approach. The importance of a need-based approach was confirmed by other best practices during the discussion in the online policy table (Digital Innovation Hub Western Austria, <https://dih-west.at/>, Digital Tirol, <https://www.digital.tirol/>). In addition, the crucial role of the legislative framework was stressed during the policy table. Finding ways to fully benefit from the European legislative framework was identified as an important task for policy makers at the level of member states and regions. While public support and policies were considered as the basic framework during the discussions, it has also been a recurrent topic to stress the role of markets and private solutions in overcoming digitalisation challenges for SMEs. Learning from other actors on the market, from mature SMEs having used digitalisation successfully to tap into a second life opportunity, often proves to be most effective. Cases of private platforms available to offer digitalisation support for mature SMEs were mentioned. In particular with respect to the set-up of peer learning networks and consulting services, public-private partnerships have appeared as successful approaches. In a similar vein, cluster initiatives can become important tools in addressing digitalisation challenges for mature SMEs.

Overall, a clear picture has emerged from the discussion, which confirms the relevance of the BE-READI ALPS approach. As diverse as the identified challenges, as diverse are the required solutions. To tap into the opportunity of digitalisation requires much more than a one-size fits all approach. What is needed to use digitalisation to boost mature SMEs in launching their second life project, are tailor-made services, as they are currently developed within the BE-READI ALPS project.





The following Challenges and Solutions were found within this discussion

Challenges 	Solutions 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate uptake of digital solutions is present nowadays. Europe is slow in adopting digital innovations, the adoption is uneven between Member States, solving the issue only at national level likely led to fragmented approach due to different starting points and public sector does not play its role of "first mover" in deploying latest technologies to offer best services to citizens and business. • To tap into the opportunity of digitalisation requires much more than a one-size fits all approach • How to increase value added and the competitiveness of SMEs • How to motivate SMEs to become more digital • There's a low level of digital skills among primary and secondary school pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the approach of vocational and technical schools (skills) and strengthen the education through digital channels • More cooperation and better equipment (infrastructure) for learning competencies • Provide better exchange between research and SMEs (more systematic and consistent approach) • Provide an easier access of SMEs to digital providers (e.g. digital vouchers) • Launch and support initiative aiming at providing tailor-made services (e.g. BE-READI ALPS path) • Digital Vouchers and other incentives for digitalization • Cooperation with schools



Policy Table #3: How to fund innovative projects in European SMEs

There is no doubt that adequate funding (both public and private) can be considered the motor of any successful RDI (research, development and innovation) initiative. As key actors of the Alpine Space economy, SMEs would be particularly important actors to involve in RDI as a basis for a sustainable and inclusive transformation path. Nevertheless, access to funding for innovative projects in SMEs remains challenging today. Two topics have been identified as key stumbling blocks:

First, research, development and innovation do not stop at political borders. Effective industry-research cooperation requires the possibility to work with partners from foreign regions. This paradigm is reflected by the increasing importance of the macroregional approach (represented in the case of the Alpine Space by the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region – EUSALP) within European innovation policy. Today, the macro-regions are undoubtedly recognised as fertile grounds for cross-regional innovation in a broad sense (cultural, social, economic...) and gaining importance within the framework of European funding for the programming period 2021-2027. What all the macro-regional initiatives have in common, however, is a certain malaise in moving from identified potentials to actions, in translating opportunities into implementation projects. A persistent funding gap has been experienced in recent years at the level of cross-regional RDI projects, and in particular at the level of projects involving SME participation.¹

Second, research, development and innovation are, from an economic perspective, topics located at the intersection of free markets and public policy, between private and public funding. A more efficient combination of market-driven innovation support and state intervention is recognized as an untapped potential in the funding of innovation projects in SMEs.

It was the aim of the third policy table of the BE-READI ALPS project to debate these two topics, stumbling blocks and opportunities for innovation driven SMEs at the same time, with the project's observers. The discussion focused on providing an overview of the status quo in terms of cross-regional funding opportunities for innovation projects in SMEs and best practices in combining public and private funding. The speakers then shared the obstacles and challenges they identified in their experience with SMEs. The discussion finally hinted at potential solutions and ideas for the future.

¹See: *New power for the macro-regional innovation motors: a call for a wave of new cross-regional funding schemes in Europe the macro-regional approach*. Position paper HES-SO//FR HEIA-FR / Anteja / VDI/VDE / Bavarian Research Alliance, 2020. Online version: <https://bit.ly/320uQip>.



The interventions and discussions at the third BE-READI ALPS policy table have confirmed that cross-regional innovation cooperation is a big opportunity for SMEs, still partly untapped. Offers are available for SMEs interested in getting involved in cross-regional innovation projects, in particular through programmes such as Eureka and Eurostars, but also through targeted SME support as currently provided by many of the organisations reunited at this policy table.

Nevertheless, the participants of the policy table have also identified important remaining challenges and barriers for SMEs. In a nutshell, it remains a complex issue for SMEs to find the right partners in the right projects (“projects that match an SME’s strategy”) with the right timing. Pathways to improved access for SMEs to cross-regional innovation projects include more efficient match-making services, better communication and “translation” between the mindset of the innovation funding world and SME’s strategies, faster decision processes and more flexible cooperation programmes. In this last regard it would be particularly interesting to increase efforts for synchronizing calls of existing regional programmes (which are often closer to regional SME ecosystems than big European cooperation programmes) across borders.²

A big potential was identified in the field of combining private with public funding opportunities. Best practices have been presented in the different interventions at the policy table. It nevertheless remains a challenge to combine small individual innovative SME projects into larger structures interesting for private equity investors. It was stressed that improvements for the future need to take intellectual property issues into account. There is a clear need for a systematic value management, a long-term vision regarding the exploitation of intellectual assets and appropriate strategies to develop well managed patent portfolios.

² See the Innovation Express 2021 for a successful example of synchronized calls for SME innovation projects across regions: <https://innovation-express-2021.b2match.io/>.





The following Challenges and Solutions were found within this discussion

Challenges	Solutions
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in moving from identified potentials to actions, in translating opportunities into implementation projects. • Persistent funding gap has been experienced in recent years at the level of cross-regional RDI projects, and in particular at the level of projects involving SME participation. • Cross-regional innovation cooperation is a big opportunity for SMEs, still partly untapped. • Innovation do not stop at political borders. Effective industry-research cooperation requires the possibility to work with partners from foreign regions. • A persistent funding gap has been experienced in recent years at the level of cross-regional RDI projects, and in particular at the level of projects involving SME participation. • It remains a complex issue for SMEs to find the right partners in the right projects (“projects that match an SME’s strategy) with the right timing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs like EUREKA and Eurostars address especially SMEs, so do other business support organizations. • Match-making services that are well communicated. • Synchronizing calls of existing regional programmes across borders. • Systematic value management, a long-term vision regarding the exploitation of intellectual assets and appropriate strategies to develop well managed patent portfolios. • Improved access for SMEs to cross-regional innovation projects include more efficient match-making services, better communication and “translation” between the mindset of the innovation funding world and SMEs’ strategies, faster decision processes and more flexible cooperation programmes. • A “common research agenda” able to build an effective R&I ecosystem in the Alpine Macroregional area.
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permanent tables at macroregional level to foster cooperative schemes or joint initiatives. |
|--|---|



Policy Table #4: Toward the Green Transition – An ecosystem ready to boost the business resilience

Venice, 24th March 2022 (online, promoted by the Italian Presidency of EUSALP)

On 24th March 2022 the fourth BE-READI Policy Table TOWARD THE GREEN TRANSITION - An ecosystem ready to boost the business resilience, a moment of discussion between the Alpine regions, to talk about businesses and green transition, deepening new approaches, processes and tools for a strategic and operational cooperation between regions. The policy table was organised by Veneto Innovazione in the frame of EUSALP Italian Presidency in cooperation with the Veneto Region.

It was the aim of this fourth policy table of the BE-READI ALPS project to discuss the status quo, remaining challenges and barriers, and ideas for future improvements in the quest of engaging the Alpine region's SME ecosystem into green transition. The discussion focused on two broad issues, a general overview on how to facilitate the green transition for businesses in the Alpine region, and a discussion specifically addressing the question of how to improve cross-border cooperation among relevant innovation actors. The participants on the panels represented the business perspective, research, clusters, but also policy levels.

Among the most urgent issues to better support businesses on green transition, the experts emphasized the role of a more harmonized legislative approach (inducing internalization of external costs) and the need for best practices as a means to effectively communicate about opportunities and solutions.

From a practical perspective, companies are often also needing simple support to take relevant first steps towards greener approaches, which entities such as cluster initiatives can provide.

As another challenge, the panellists have identified the difficulty to deploy scientific knowledge among SMEs. The discussion has also touched upon the issue of greenwashing, with some panellists seeing greenwashing critically, while others emphasizing the fact that greenwashing can be an entry point towards real action.

With respect to improved cross-regional cooperation, good practice has been shared from recent experience with the Innovation Express 2021, which was a successful attempt at establishing cross-regional synchronized calls for RDI projects.

It was highlighted that improved cooperation is not only necessary within, but also between macro-regions and that there remains an unexploited potential to learn from each other.

In addition, managing authorities of mainstream programs should be involved much more in cross-regional RDI cooperation. The policy table also provided very concrete ideas to further push cross-regional action on green transition for SME, including a permanent table with political EUSALP representatives on green transition and trainings on cooperation mechanisms and capacity building.





The following Challenges and Solutions were found within this discussion

Challenges 	Solutions 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To translate into increased competitiveness of businesses and regions, green transition needs to be understood from the business perspective. • By turning away from fossil-fuel based economy, there are environmental and societal benefits, but it also needs to be economically sustainable. • Difficulty to deploy scientific knowledge among SMEs • Improve cooperation among Managing Authority in EUSALP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a more harmonized legislative approach • Produce and disseminate best practices as a means to effectively communicate about opportunities and solutions. • There is a need for joined forces, opportunities need to be used and seen, no matter where they're located so that synergies can lead to innovative solutions. • Launch Cross-regional synchronized calls • Foster Cooperation not only within but between MRS • Include Managing Authorities of mainstream programs much stronger in cross-regional RDI cooperation • Launch Permanent table with political EUSALP representatives on green transition (EUBSR) / Training





	on cooperation mechanisms and capacity building
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Final Conclusion

Access to Finance and Fundings

1

Boost public financial initiatives and combine private funding with public funding schemes



Support SMEs in becoming investment ready

A traditional Bank lending is still the most common source of finance for European SMEs. There is a need for more public funding, especially in the area of high-innovative projects, which are often seen as being too risky for traditional banks to support. Thus, public funding shall be extended.

At the same time SMEs need to be supported in becoming more investment-ready and are more capable to present their business to all kinds of financiers.

Digitalization

2

Europe has to become faster in adopting digital innovations



Provide an easier access of SMEs to digital providers

Europe is slow in adopting digital innovations and also the adoption is uneven amongst the EU member states. The countries should support each other more in becoming digital.

One way to implement this goal could be to provide an easier access of SMEs to digital providers and supporting initiatives providing tailor-made services, like the project BE-READI Alps.



3

Green Transition

Europe needs to join their forces in order to best implement innovative solutions for the Green Transition



SMEs need to be supported so that the Green Transitions is economically sustainable for them



It's important that Europe will now join their forces and focus on implementing innovative solutions for the Green Transition. Now is a crucial time to have a strong focus on that.

However, within this process SMEs need to be financially and otherwise supported, in order to make the Green Transition also economically sustainable for their business.

4

Alpine Space Cooperation

Support effective industry-research cooperation



Improve the access for SMEs to cross-regional innovation projects



Innovation does not stop at political or sectorial borders. Cooperation between companies from different sectors as well as research-based organizations is crucial to use the whole economic potential in Europe.

Also, international cooperation should be supported and enhanced, thus we need more efficient match-making services as well as possibilities to »translate« between the mindset of companies from different sectors and different countries.

The interventions and discussions at the BE-READI ALPS Policy Tables tackled very relevant topics and issues that all countries in the Alpine Space area are facing. Probably the most relevant result was that the Policy Tables have confirmed that cross-regional innovation cooperation is a big opportunity for SMEs, still partly untapped.

Only when cooperating inter-regionally we can fully use our joint forces and support our SMEs in getting better access to finance, in becoming better digitalized, in being more innovative and in boosting their business resilience through the green transition. The project has shown the big potential that mature SMEs in the Alpine Space area have to start a second life, if they are open to new ways of working. In order to know how to do that they need the support of strong business support organizations who also exchange inter-regionally and thus jointly find the best solutions to the common challenges all countries and SMEs in the Alpine Space area have.



Annex 1 – Graphic representation of the Roadmap



Interreg Alpine Space
BE-READI ALPS

BE-READI Alps Strategic Roadmap for Alpine Space competitiveness

1 Access to Finance and Fundings

- Boost public financial initiatives and combine private funding with public funding schemes
- Support SMEs in becoming investment ready

2 Digitalization

- Europe has to become faster in adopting digital innovations
- Provide an easier access of SMEs to digital providers

3 Green Transition

- Europe needs to join their forces in order to best implement innovative solutions for the Green Transition
- SMEs need to be supported so that the Green Transitions is economically sustainable for them

4 Alpine Space Cooperation

- Support effective industry-research cooperation
- Improve the access for SMEs to cross-regional innovation projects

Read more about the project:
<https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/be-readi-alps/en/home>



Annex 2 – BE-READI ALPS White Paper

This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg Alpine Space programme



Deliverable D.T3.1.1 “BE-READI Alps White Paper”

The results and recommendations based on the discussions within
the BE-READI Alps Policy Tables

June 2022

WP 3 Alpine Space is READI – aws – Christina Koch, Bianca Kahr, Karin Winkelbauer

And the Output Papers Writers: Julian Lombardo, Luca Filippi (CCIAA BOLZANO), Leonida Polajnar, Marjana Savić, Vladimir Rudl (RCCSB Maribor), Mathilde Mauvais, Nicolas Chehanne (risingSUD), Maria Sole D’Orazio, Ivan Boesso (Veneto Innovazione)



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Introduction

Within the BE-READI Alps project four Policy Tables took place from 2020 until 2022. The topics those policy dialogues focussed on were:

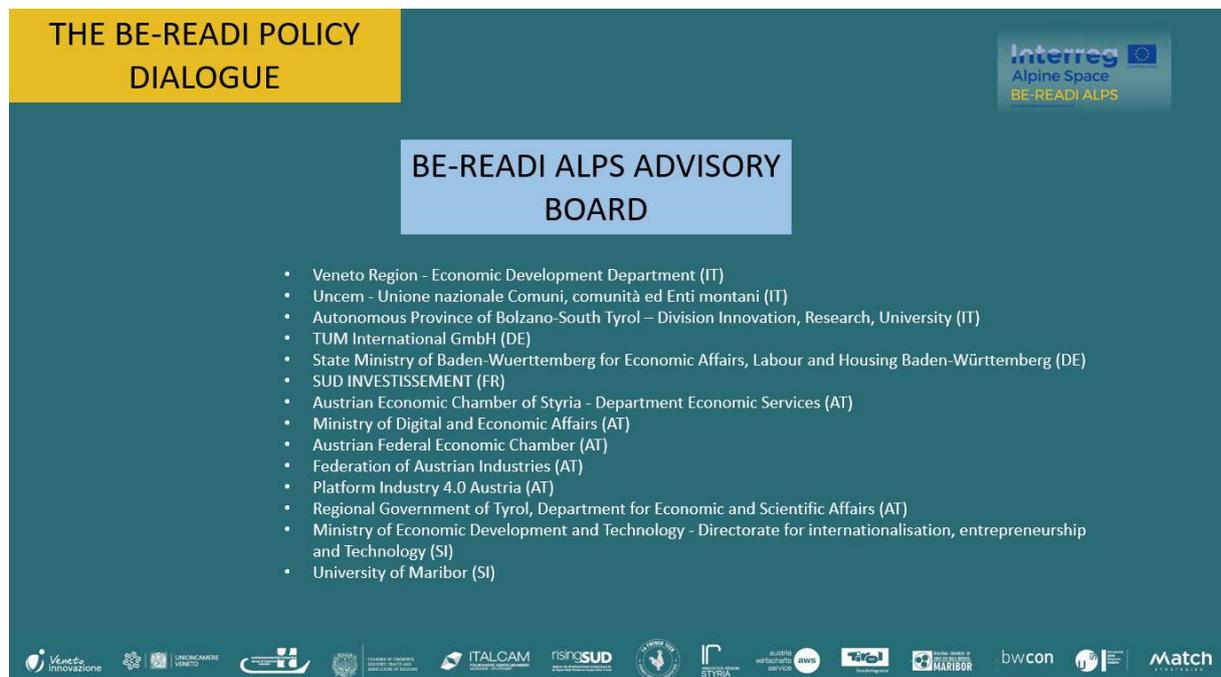
Policy Table #1: Access to Finance

Policy Table #2: Digitalisation

Policy Table #3: How to fund innovative projects in European SMEs

Policy Table #4: Toward a Green Transition – An ecosystem ready to boost the business resilience.

Within these Policy Tables numerous experts, policy makers, business support organisations and business representatives gave their insights on the previously named topics. They were supported by the BE-READI Alps Advisory Board.



THE BE-READI POLICY DIALOGUE

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Logos at the bottom include: VenEs innovascone, UNICOMERIE VENETO, ITALCAM, risingSUD, STYRIA, austro wirtschafts service, Tiro, HARBOR, bwcon, and Match.

Figure: List of BE-READI Alps Advisory Board Members

This White Paper includes the results and recommendations based on the discussions within the BE-READI Alps Policy Tables.



Input/Output Paper “Access to Finance”

The written presentation of cases selected for the meeting in Bolzano, 5th March 2020

Introduction

On 5th of March the first Alpine Space Open Table was supposed to be held in Bolzano, focussing on the topic of “Access to Finance”. Due to the unforeseeable COVID-19 crisis, the event had to be cancelled on short term.

This input paper collects the contribution of the planned presenters, giving examples on programmes supporting SMEs in the topic of access to finance from different regions in the Alpine Space area, starting with an introduction to activities of A2F in South Tyrol by Luca Filippi, Deputy Secretary-General at the Chamber of Commerce Bolzano, followed by an insight to the EU perspective for the new phase by Armando Melona, DG Grow H3. In the end Christina Koch from Austria Wirtschaftsservice gives two good practice examples from Austria on funding programmes that enhance intersectoral cooperation.



Introduction to activities of A2F in South Tyrol and BE-READI ALPS

Luca Filippi, Deputy Secretary-General, Chamber of commerce of BOLZANO/BOZEN

SMEs are the core of the local economic and productive system in South Tyrol.

At the local level, the preferred channel for access to credit remains the traditional and conventional banking sector, while alternative financing is still a niche market, though it has shown signs of growth in recent years compared to the Italian market.

The South Tyrolian business ecosystem is polarized into two major actors:

- the local market: a first one, naturally aimed at the local market, which operates in the classic sectors of intervention, especially in the handcraft sector.

- the innovation effort: alongside this consolidated system emerges an innovation-intensive economy and the result of the interventions made to promotion of the innovation system with very precise characteristics:

- a global vision
- a permeable organisational structure in which R&D are an integral part high-intensity relationship and qualification systems
- few interactions with the traditional business system

Alongside these two main actors there are consolidated trade associations with different traditions and weight and intertwined with the historical development of the territory. These associations have strong ties with their members and are deeply rooted in the local economic system. On this regard, the recent years seem to have stimulated an intersectoral collaboration that goes beyond the apparent self-referentiality of the past.

In our region also the NOI Tech Park is situated, an Innovation Hub, that strengthens the innovation effort of our companies.

At regional level, in recent years, different public and private stakeholders have undertaken several initiatives to promote alternative finance in order to facilitate access to finance.

The Chamber of commerce of Bolzano as a partner of the EEN network, has set up an information desk at its headquarters for local companies.

This information desk provides companies with an overview of existing financial instruments both at local and European level.

Particularly micro enterprises and start-ups have difficulties in accessing small loans. The Chamber of commerce in order to deliver assistance in the field of access to microfinance, will set up a microfinance contact point for start-ups and micro enterprises.



The mission of this contact point is to promote access to credit for micro businesses through the promotion of microfinance instruments, technical assistance, research, training and the dissemination of good practices.

In order to guarantee an efficient and up-to-date service, the main players in the local financial system have been contacted in order to obtain a complete overview of the services offered in terms of access to finance.

It emerged that most local banks and intermediaries currently have an agreement with various guarantee funds financed by the EU, while considering instead possibilities of alternative finance, especially crowdfunding platforms are involved. At the time 24 projects have been financed in South Tyrol by a donation and reward funding platform.

This mapping of the locally available financing instruments was extremely useful in creating a knowledge base about the regional availability of appropriate financing products of different kinds, such as grants, loans, guarantees, mezzanine and others.

The Innovation Service Point of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen - South Tyrol plays an important role in providing support in the granting of innovation facilities and innovation Calls for Proposals (cooperation projects and for specific economic sectors). At present, most revolving funds and guarantees are disbursed, with fewer actual contributions as was customary a few years ago).



Access to Finance - the EU perspective for the new phase

Armando Melone, DG Grow H3

SMEs play a key role for the creation of growth and jobs in Europe and across regions, including in the Alpine Space. These companies with less than 250 employees, often with traditional business models, are the backbone of our economy. They account for 99% of the total number of companies in EU, for 67% of people employed and 57% of total value added.

To allow SMEs to flourish in the EU, both policy makers and businesses need to act. Companies must enhance their management practices and broaden their understanding of innovation. Policy makers need to ensure consistent policy frameworks in areas critical to innovation, support cooperation across industrial value chains, reduce market fragmentation and ensure funding.

The latter is of particular relevance for policy makers. In Europe, SMEs still have problems accessing various forms of finance. This is valid across all the regions, including the Alpine space. Financing gaps exist and the COVID-19 situation has exacerbated the issues. Bank lending is the most common source of finance for European SMEs, according to the latest SME Access to Finance Survey conducted by the European Commission and the European Central Bank. However, we still observe a relevant percentage of SMEs who applied for bank financing but did not receive the financing they had planned for.

Though there is little variation between the proportion of SMEs applying for bank loans across sectors of industry, there is strong correlation between enterprise size and the degree of application success: the smaller the enterprise, the higher its chance of not getting a loan. This situation naturally raises concerns on smaller companies' ability to raise finance in the EU.

On the upside, one should recall that there are plenty of alternatives to traditional bank lending for start-ups and SMEs seeking finance in EU. Depending on the size of the investment and the stage of a company's growth, money can be raised through family and friends, crowdfunding, business angels, venture capital, listing on a stock exchange etc.

Equity is an important source of finance, particularly venture capital. However, it is taken up by only a minority of start-ups and SMEs. This is not only a demand-side issue: in some EU countries equity markets, including public ones, are less developed than in others.

The European Commission is committed to solving these issues, that the COVID-19 crisis has deepened. It has in place a set of different policies aimed at varying from financial instruments, regulatory tools to "soft" power. These policies set a framework for the medium to long term, but they are also valid to address short-term liquidity issues faced by SMEs as a consequence of COVID-19.

A share of the EU budget is dedicated to programmes and instruments supporting innovative start-ups and SMEs. Within the programming period 2014-2020, the Commission has in place the **COSME** programme which supports the achievement of various objectives, including better access to finance for SMEs, access to markets for SMEs, entrepreneurship, and more favourable conditions for business creation and growth.

To improve SMEs' access to finance, COSME uses financial instruments in the form of a risk-sharing mechanism and an equity instrument which are solely available for SMEs. The **Loan Guarantee Facility** mainly provides guarantees to financial intermediaries for lending to riskier SMEs (transactions which



financial intermediaries would not be prepared to do if they had to bear the risk alone). The **Equity Facility for Growth** focuses on investments into risk capital funds which in turn provide equity financing to SMEs in their growth and expansion stage. Both instruments complement those available under the **Horizon 2020 InnovFin** programme, which are dedicated mainly to innovative SMEs and small mid-caps, and the instruments available under the SME window of the **European Fund for Strategic Investments**. Most of the EU financial instruments are implemented by the European Investment Bank group on behalf of the European Commission and deployed via local financial intermediaries who support companies at local level e.g. via traditional bank loans. A comprehensive list of all the intermediaries supported by these and other EU financial instruments is available.

For the future framework period 2021-2027, financial instruments for SMEs will be available under the future **InvestEU** programme that will contain a dedicated SME window building on the success of the existing financial instruments for SMEs.

However, if we want to have a durable impact on economic conditions in Europe, then we need more structural change too. For these reasons, the Commission is addressing the main bottlenecks that SMEs are facing, notably through a dedicated **SME strategy**, and by further developing its **Capital Markets Union strategy**, that will help SMEs' access to capital markets-based financing.

Improving the financing landscape for SMEs is a necessary condition for a prosperous European economy across all regions, including the Alpine space. To face the issues, that the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated, efforts should be undertaken by the EU jointly with national, regional and local administrations to support growth and job creation, enabling Europe to exit from the crisis and fulfil again its economic potential.



aws good practice: funding programs to enhance intersectoral cooperation

Christina Koch, Austria Wirtschaftsservice

Using the transformative power of creative companies to support SME from the wider economy is one of the three main pillars of the Creative Industries Strategy for Austria¹. It is a clear goal for Austria to enhance cooperation between creative industries and the wider economy.

So far Austria Wirtschaftsservice has two financial instruments, that are enhancing those kinds of cooperation.

1. Kreativwirtschaftsscheck (National Creative Voucher)
2. Creat(iv)e Solutions Programme

Kreativwirtschaftsscheck (National Creative Voucher)

General Description

KWS is a voucher worth up to 5.000€ to be used by any kind of SME based in AT for cooperation with a creative service provider from anywhere in the world.

Creative entrepreneurs are pioneers in developing and applying new forms of work and are often the basis of new services or organisation models. SME coming from other sectors mostly aren't aware of the potential benefits arising from cooperating with a creative. The idea behind the KWS was to fund small-scale incentives to trigger cooperation between SME and creatives.

The scheme was first developed and tested through an EU-project (ECIA) in the CIP program and then became a national program.

KWS is a low-threshold grant worth up to 5.000€ that enables SME from all industries to use creative services within the framework of an innovation project. The aim is to foster innovation in SME by the integration of creative services and thereby to stimulate cross-industrial collaboration and spill-over effects.

The direct beneficiary are the SME that can, through the voucher, buy the service of a creative. The SME has to be based in AT, the creative can be from any country! The voucher can be used for one year starting on the day of application.

In 2013 the scheme started with a first-come-first-serve principle. Since 2014 it has been possible to apply one month of the year. After the deadline all received applications are given a randomized order (by an external notary). Then the first 300/600 projects that meet the basic criteria will receive the

¹ <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2053/creative-industries-strategy-for-austria/>



voucher. The application process has been changed in order to avoid an immense amount of applic.in the first days of the open call.

Resources needed

aws received between 1,5-3 Mio.€ plus 10% for admin.costs by the ministry of economy p.a. There is one person dedicated full time for this action. Additionally this person is supported by experts on CI, the IT-, the media-, as well as by the customer service-team during the application phase.

Evidence of success

Already within the testing phase through the EU-project ECIA there was a huge demand for the vouchers.

KWS is with on average 2.000 applic.of which 300/600 applicants receive the voucher p.a. the most demanded program at aws and a huge success.

The expected long-term outcomes are a rise in cooperation betw.SME and creatives, also after the voucher, because the SME would understand the benefit from working together with creatives. So far 2.100 vouchers have been distributed (as of April2018)

Difficulties encountered

It is quite an administrative effort to handle the huge interest in the vouchers (<2.000 applic. p.a.). This makes a jury-process impossible. aws changed the selection mode from a first-come-first-serve principle to a predefined submission period with a subsequent random selection through a notary.

Potential for learning or transfer

This voucher scheme can be interesting for other regions as it is easily transferrable. It can also support regions in the internationalization of their SMEs, as only the SME has to be based in Austria whereas the creative service provider can be from any other country.

KWS has proven that it has stimulated and supported collaboration between creatives and SMEs from other sectors. It exhibits rather high additionality effects and has, correspondingly, low deadweight losses, which is remarkable, given the low-threshold character and approach of the scheme. The already realised and/or anticipated follow-up contracts between the KWS-collaboration partners show that the KWS scheme may be indeed able to trigger behavioral changes with non-CI firms, in that a sizable share of non-CI firms continue their collaboration with the CI companies after the KWS-supported project. An effect, which most likely also other regions would be interested in initiating.

Creat(iv)e Solutions Programme



In 2018 has tried to find other financial solutions to get a program financed, that enhances the transformative power of CI and has applied for the funding of a new program named “Creat(iv)e Solutions” at the National Foundation Austria for Research, Technology and Innovation (NFTE) with a very similar thematic scope. aws received the positive feedback for that application in 2018.

General Description

aws Creati(v)e Solutions is a pilot program for lighthouse projects, which addresses and makes visible the increased use and integration of creative industry know-how along the entire value chain and across sector boundaries (=transformative effects or cross-over effects of the creative industry into other sectors).

The addressed projects act as catalysts that initiate or enable transformation mechanisms in other sectors of the economy. The creative industries make a special contribution here, as their know-how and working methods represent a significant enrichment for previous innovation processes. This can lead to newly conceived approaches to solutions as well as to quicker innovation cycles along the entire value-added chain and thus bring corresponding competitive advantages.

The projects to be funded are characterised by the fact that new innovation impulses can be achieved by integrating creative industry topics, methods and services into the value chain as early as possible – impulses, which are essential for other sectors but also for the creative industries themselves. Thematically, this can concern, among other things, manufacturing companies, tourism, science, education, digitalization, service innovation, social innovation, social challenges, climate change, energy and resource issues, mobility, urbanisation, alternative financing models or similar.

Specifically, the funding is aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises in all sectors that develop innovative, new solutions to challenges together with a company from the creative industries.

The challenges addressed should be of broad relevance, so that the solutions developed can then also benefit other companies. Ultimately, the program aims to demonstrate that creative companies help to find new, innovative solutions → "Creat(iv)e Solutions".

The requirements

In the context of the application, the following requirement profile was submitted to aws Creat(iv)e Solutions:

- The program supports innovation systems in which the creative industries make a significant contribution to initiating, improving and/or further developing innovative products, processes or services. The focus is thus on the promotion of interdisciplinary innovation systems and enabling structures, whereby new approaches and working methods are applied in innovation processes. The creative industries provide precisely this interdisciplinary approach and offer added value in the innovation process of other industries through newly developed approaches and working methods. (see Creative Industries Strategy for Austria, Measure 20 - Continue and expand innovation promotion in the creative industries, page 59)2.

- The aim of aws Creat(iv)e Solutions is to create a deliberate incentive on the part of the public sector for cross-sector cooperation (creative industries, all sectors) in order to transform traditional (old,

² https://www.kreativwirtschaft.at/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Kreativwirtschaftsstrategie_für_Österreich.pdf



traditional) approaches into innovative, forward-looking "approaches" (processes, models, networks, structures, systems etc.). State-of-the-art methods and functionalities of Open Innovation shall/can be applied.

- Due to the special significance of the creative industries in this pilot program, new impulses can be given in Austria and interdisciplinary working methods and approaches to solutions can be expanded. A central economic question is how innovations arise - in most cases they are incremental innovations. Increasing digitalization and other global trends make it necessary to innovate faster and in large steps. Besides technical innovation, the greatest potential is seen here in adapting to trends, changing the product, the market, communication with the market, but also in changing the business model. The creative industries are very close to the product, design, communication, other business models and trends, which provides ideal starting points for crossover effects or transformative aspects of innovation.

This approach could be a unique selling proposition for Austria as a business location. Funding programs supporting this approach would be of great importance, especially for SMEs, and could contribute significantly to strengthening Austria as a location for innovation.

The framework conditions

The implementation of the pilot program was conceived as a call for two consecutive years.

The pilot program will support these projects with a maximum grant amount of EUR 200.000.- and a maximum project duration of one year. Personnel costs, material costs, third-party costs and other costs (e.g. material, travel costs) can be considered eligible for funding.

The inclusion/consideration of the creative industries as essential actors in the innovation process is at the heart of the funded projects. Innovation systems in the context of this pilot program refer to dynamic structures, processes, methods, etc. - the aim of which is to create an innovative capability. In other words, to create "possibility spaces" in which - topic-specific or regional - innovations can be thought of, initiated or supported.

In order to illustrate the diversity (topic-specific or regional) of the possible innovation systems across all sectors, measures to increase the impact are planned within Austria with the main actors.

The pilot program deliberately follows a broad approach in order not to prevent (new) innovation systems and enabling structures in advance. An accompanying evaluation will assess and evaluate this approach.

The projects funded under the concept act as catalysts that set in motion, enable and/or support the transformation mechanisms in other areas of the economy as well. Interdisciplinarity through openness to topics, exchange across sectors and subject areas is central to this project. Out-of-the-box thinking should be made possible.

TIMEFRAME

The time frame is based on the detailed conception, implementation as well as the application and execution of two call rounds.

Call 2019

The first call round already took place in autumn 2019. The call was open for submission from 2nd September, 2019 to 28th October, 2019. There were 84 submissions from a wide range of industries and fields of activity. In an intensive process an internal jury selected 12 finalists who were invited to pitch before an external jury of experts. Of the final 12 projects, 7 received a positive commitment and thus a funding contract.



aws Creative Solutions 2019

Timetable

01.04.2019 – 31.12.2019



Call 2020

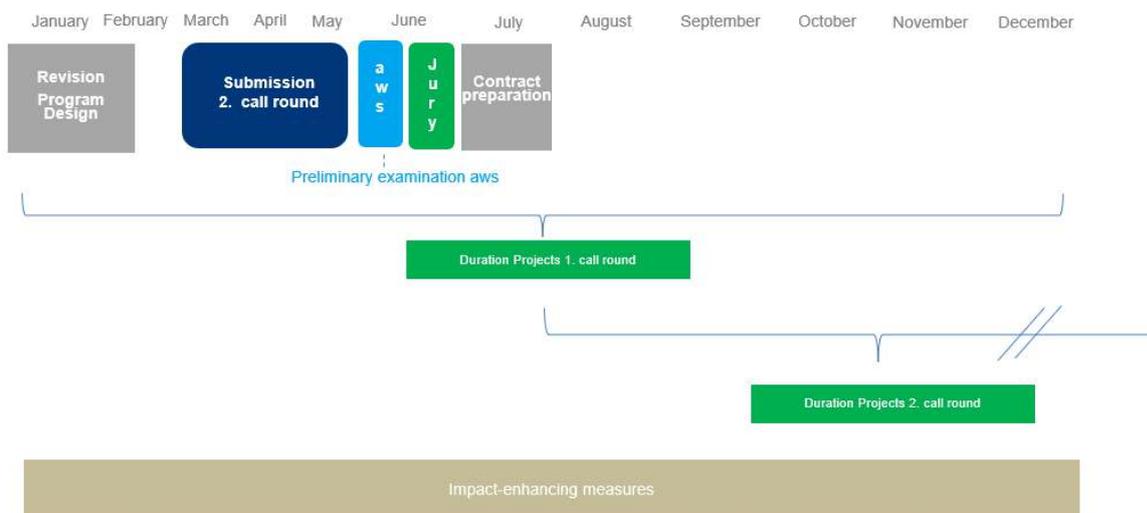
The second call round will take place in the first half of 2020. The call will be open for submission from 2nd March, 2020 to 8th May, 2020. After that, the same selection process as in the previous year will take place. Certainly, the experiences from the first call round are taken into account.

Parallel to this second submission and selection process, the contract management phase of the first call will take place, as well as a review of conditions and milestones, payments and the funding for the projects. At least one accompanying event and an evaluation are also planned for the period 2020.

aws Creative Solutions 2020

Timetable

01.01.2020 – 31.12.2020



Resources needed

This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg Alpine Space programme



aws has a budget of EUR 3,2 million, of which EUR 2,6 million are reserved for grants. This money will be used to finance two call rounds. The budget for this money comes from the National Foundation Austria for Research, Technology and Innovation (NFTE)³.

This pilot is paid by the National Foundation for Research, Technology and Innovation (NFTE). The task of the foundation is to promote research, technology and development in Austria, especially interdisciplinary research measures that can be used over the long term. The Foundation's grants are to be distributed to federal funding agencies in accordance with the resolutions of the Board of Trustees.

Expected impacts

Past experiences have shown that if SME from the wider economy were willing to cooperate with a creative service provider, this happened mainly at the end of an innovation process, when the product development was already almost finished. At this stage creative service providers have only limited possibilities to improve the product. The Creat(iv)e Solutions Program shall raise the awareness of cooperating with creative service providers already from the beginning of an innovation process, also in big scale projects.

Through the Creat(iv)e Solutions Program it is expected to have 10 to 15 flagship projects that clearly show the benefit of cooperating with a creative service provider also on a bigger scale already from the beginning of an innovation process. Those flagship projects shall then be used to promote the immense transformative power of creative industries for the wider economy and shall enhance the intersectoral cooperation in the future.

³ <http://www.stiftung-fte.at/> The financial endowment of the National Foundation Austria for Research, Technology and Innovation is composed by contributions of the National Bank of Austria, the National ERP-Funds and the Austria-Funds.



Conclusion

This input paper on “Access to Finance” gave an overview on examples and good practices from the Alpine Space regions South Tyrol and Austria in order to support SMEs to get a better access on finance. Both regions have put a focus on stimulating intersectoral collaboration in order to boost the overall economy and could show some of the positive effects, those programmes have already had in the past.

Armando Melone gave a very current input on how the European Commission is committed to solving the issue of access to finance for SMEs, especially now with the COVID-19 crisis hitting European SMEs hard. He lists all the different EU-programmes where there will be financial instruments available for European SMEs.

It is crucial, especially under the current circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis, to support SMEs in the Alpine Space area through access to finance in various ways, in order for them to survive and maintain the competitiveness of the Alpine Space economy.



Input/Output Paper “Digitalization”

The written presentation of cases selected for the on-line meeting

October 7th, 2020

Introduction

Michael Keller [CH] - Applied R&D Service | HES-SO Fribourg | School of Engineering and Architecture Advisory Board Facilitator

How can digitalisation boost mature SMEs in launching their second life project? Digitalisation is without doubt one of the most frequently mentioned aspects of SMEs’ transformation processes. Success stories related to digitalisations are abundant and in a certain sense one could come to believe that the second life of mature SMEs lies often only a click away. And indeed, there are examples in which digitalization appears to be the natural evolution for a business to grow spontaneously into new opportunities. But as with all transformation processes, opportunities from digitalisation behave a bit like icebergs. There is a tip of the opportunity visible to everyone, laying open in the sea for businesses to tap into. But the big bulk of the transformation potential remains underwater, hidden behind waves of challenges and market failures of all sorts. In short, while there might be cases in which the opportunities from digitalisation naturally and spontaneously lead to a second life for mature SMEs, in most of the cases this road is paved with stumbling blocks requiring smart strategies to make the opportunity available on a wider scale. This is what we designate by “policy interventions”. It is nevertheless important to note, that policies are understood in a broader sense than simply as state support. They include the complete set of solutions that can be identified to overcome identified challenges. A strategic approach to identifying opportunities, challenges and required solutions, at the level of all involved actors, public and private, is what we could call a typical policy development process.

In order to maximize the opportunities at hand, to reveal as much as possible of the iceberg, so to speak, such a policy development process needs to be interactive and rely on a participation of actors from the quadruple helix – businesses, research, policymakers and society. And it needs to benefit from mutual learning interactions. Challenges are often shared across different regions. And only in an open policy dialogue can successful solutions be multiplied. This is precisely what the series of policy tables of the BE-READI ALPS project aims at. Its Advisory Board, composed of the Observers of the project, constitutes the frame for cross-regional exchange on opportunities, challenges and solutions – to start with digitalisation as a first concrete topic identified as key in the second life projects of mature SMEs in the Alpine Space.

The characteristics of a fruitful policy development process also give this paper its shape: a collection of contributions aimed at mutual learning in a policy dialogue and addressing the opportunity digitalisation represents on the way to a second life for mature SMEs, from the perspective of diverse actors of the quadruple helix.



Support for Digitalisation and Digital transformation in Slovenia

Alenka Marovt [SI] - Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of Slovenia

The following challenges of the ministry have been pointed out by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of Slovenia:

How to increase the value added in enterprises?

How to increase international competitiveness of Slovene economy?

How to motivate enterprises to implement digital transformation of their business processes (preparation of digital strategies, increase level of competences, business re-organisation, implementation of digital technologies)?

To give the best possible answer on these challenges the ministry is providing the following activities: support digital and innovative environment, where the enterprises can develop, ensure and increase internationalisation by using ICT technologies, strengthen competences of employees and executives in digital transformation and cyber security and promote implementation of Industry 4.0, including automatization and robotisation.

The ministry has defined the following goals for their actions in 2020: at least 150 enterprises will implement digital transformation; at least 300 enterprises that go international by using digitalisation; 30% higher income of them in three years; at least 15% higher value added/employee in three years.

Measures in time period 2014-2020 are including the following actions: Digital innovation hub, Digital transformation in SMEs, E business in SMEs, Digital voucher and Digital transformation of industry.

Digital innovation hub presents a Supportive environment for digital transformation and development of competences. It works as „one-stop-stop“ for digitalisation and:
establishes ecosystem,
connects (EU DIH, best practices from abroad) and Promotes digitalisation,
advises and mentors enterprises and
offers free-of-charge services for enterprises.



Digital vouchers aim for SMEs is: to increase the digital competences, preparation of digital strategy in companies, ensuring cyber security, introducing digital marketing activities and providing easy support in small amounts – from application to approval in 15 days.

SPOT info points offer free of charge information and help when preparing the application.

DIH Slovenia is providing a list of mentors and expert's support.

E Business actions aims are: enterprises support when establishing e-business with the purpose to do business abroad (e-exchange among partners, digital fairs, web pages for foreign markets, online selling, etc.

Aims of the digital transformation of SMEs actions are:

investments in production and business, using digital business in supply/sales chains and raising management capacity in SMEs,

implementation of digital strategy,

enterprises must implement the digital transformation in three years after approval of funds.

Best practice examples of two SMEs have been presented at the end of presentation as well as next generation – new EU funds to be available for Slovenia and their use for purpose of digitalisation.



Integration of digitalization for SMEs

Danijel Lamperger [SI] - managing director, Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia

Mr. Danijel Lamperger described the current situation in Slovenia. Although Slovenia ranks close to the EU average regarding digital skills, a major source of concern is the low level of inclusion of digital skills in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. The adoption of digital technologies and business models is generally well advanced, but some sectors are lagging behind. The digital transformation is strong in the automotive sector, e-commerce, tourism, innovation of composite materials and companies integrated into foreign value chains. Slovenia is strong in some niche areas such as robotics, fin-tech, cyber security and artificial intelligence (also block chain). The Covid-19 crisis presents a big boost in digitalisation of businesses in the country.

The chamber is providing: awareness raising and education of SMEs (also mentioned in the planning and strategic documents - workshops, congresses, etc.), cooperation with school and training institutions, information and assistance at the use of incentives for digitalisation. The cooperation with the Slovenian Digital Coalition (SDC) is an example of good practice in EU; it involves the participation of all stakeholders. SDC is implementing its national digital strategy and currently drafting a comprehensive artificial intelligence strategy.

In order to improve the current situation, the chamber suggest to

- improve the approach of vocational and technical schools (skills) - more cooperation and better equipment for learning competencies,
- provide better exchange between science and SMEs (more systematic and consistent approach),
- strengthen the education through digital channels - public actions, employment office, etc.; it should educate about digital competencies and implement it with new digital tools,
- to provide further digitalisation of the administration (supportive environment) - for easier access of SMEs to formal procedures.



Digitalisation – the EU perspective DG CONNECT legislative proposals

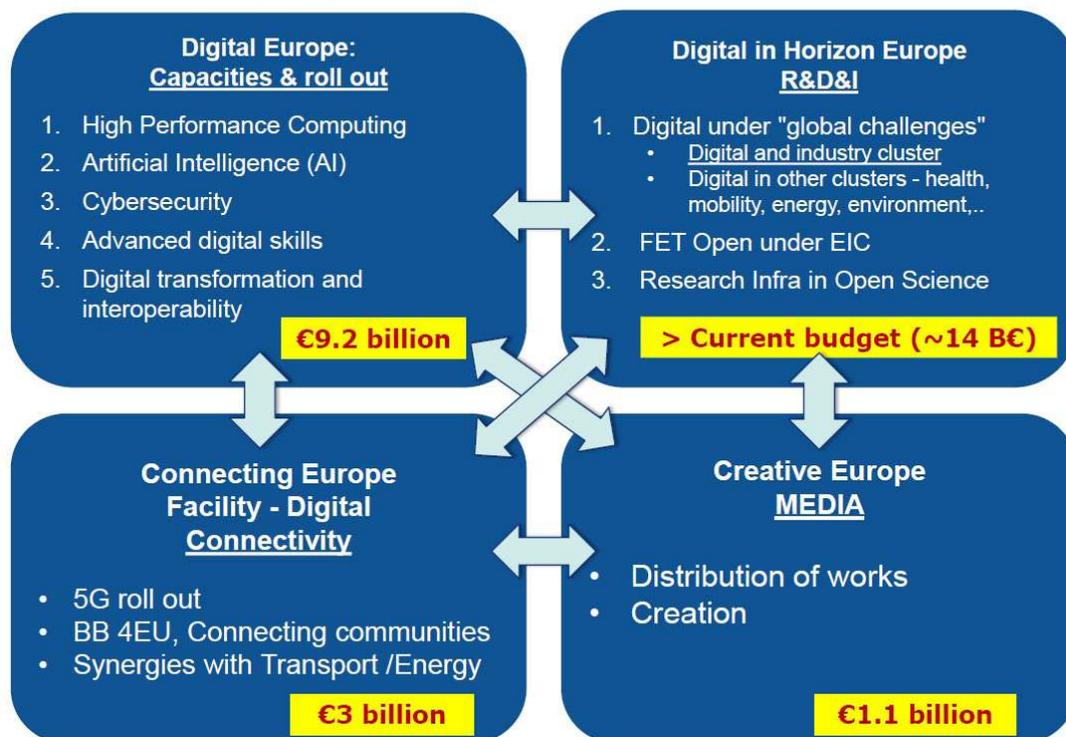
Ziga Bahovec [EC] - Directorate-General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology

Mr, Bahovec presented the Digitalisation actions in MFF 2021-2027, where the main objective is to ensure that Europe drives the digital transformation of society and economy, bringing benefits to all citizens and businesses. More specifically it aims to:

- reinforce the EU’s digital capacities (computing, data, cybersecurity, AI,..),
- ensure their widest possible roll out and maximise their benefits (to all citizens and businesses including SMEs in all regions in all sectors),
- prepare for and lead the development of next generation technologies and
- build a world-leading connectivity infrastructure



DIGITAL IN THE NEXT MFF: OVERVIEW



The Digital Europe Programme funding focused on building the strategic digital capacities of the EU and on facilitating the wide deployment of digital technologies, to be used by Europe's citizens and businesses.

Inadequate uptake of digital solutions is present nowadays. Europe is slow in adopting and diffusing digital innovations, the adoption is uneven between Member States, solving the issue only at national level likely led to fragmented approach due to different starting points and public sector does not play



its role of "first mover" in deploying latest technologies to offer best services to citizens and business. Today 81% of EU citizens use the Internet regularly.

Concerning the growth 30% of all economic growth in the EU for 2001-2011 can be attributed to ICT investment. Additional 2.7 million new ICT specialist posts in the EU (since 2005). More than 50% of companies in the EU are trying to recruit ICT specialists.

New business models are appearing, e.g. online platforms (e.g. amazon), they enable new useful interactions; 70% of "unicorns" are online platforms.

E-commerce has been growing by 20% a year for a decade; 8% of the world's retail spending

Building essential digital capacities involves:

High Performance Computing

- Acquire exascale and new petascale machines while upgrading existing supercomputers
- Develop European access to supercomputers and federate European HPC and data resources
- Widen the use of HPC and applying it across sectors

Artificial Intelligence

- Establish EU-wide common data spaces
- Develop Large-scale Testing and Experimentation Facilities
- Scale up the European AI platform

Cybersecurity

- Key capacity building: the cybersecurity shield
- Accelerate cybersecurity certification
- Widen the deployment of cybersecurity tools
- Support the NIS Directive implementation

Advanced Digital Skills

- Develop Master's programmes or modules in key capacity areas
- Develop short term training courses in key capacity areas
- Support job placements in key capacity areas
- Maintaining and populating the platform for Skills and Jobs



Good practice examples

Companies good practice: digitalisation of SMEs & supporting activities

Tomas Kokot [SI] - Flawless Code

- Digital event is a modular virtual platform for organizing events at the highest possible level. It is adapted to different requirements, advises on implementation, and provides a new user experience for visitors. It allows the execution of a wide variety of virtual events and uses a unique modular design that changes the rules of the game in the market. The platform can connect, include, customize every element of the platform, just like in the real world, and make every event unique.
- Digital event was created as a project by experienced event organizers who were forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to look for new opportunities. They combined their IT team with international experience and references and together they developed the Digital event. They realized that with virtualization they can raise events to a higher level and capitalize on rich experiences from the physical world in the digital.
-
- The platform was developed with special attention to:
 - unique graphical interface with infographic interface which allows to easily adapt to the content and graphics of each event,
 - the platform allows to organize everything from fairs to conferences and online presentations. You can involve different partners, invite participants, organize a conference...,
 - specific set of functional activities for visitors enriches visitor's user experience,
 - modular design allows to fully adapt to the wishes of the client in cost effective way.
 - their inhouse designed CMS system is designed specifically to organize virtual events, is intuitive, simple and easy to use,
 - they can track user behaviour and analyse every aspect of the event with advanced analytics.

Different event, that can be organized with the platform are: Fairs, Career fairs, Conferences, Web presentations Open days, Walkarounds. They can present client business to B2B or B2C target audience in an interactive and engaging way.

platform builds on the visitor's real event experience. It does not provide a simple website version of different exhibitors' pages; but makes the virtual event feel like the real thing. It guides the visitor with layered information delivery and experience of discovery. It provides entrance to the venue, with subsections, departments or halls and a basic element, that works as a carrier of functionality for the interaction with the visitor. Their user experience is the one of a wanderer, that cruises between digital exhibitors and engages with their content.



Technological innovation paths of manufacturing SMEs in the context of Industry 4.0

Eleonora di Maria [IT] - University of Padova

Paths of digitization of SMEs in Veneto

Results of the study carried out by the Department of Economics and Management "Marco Fanno" for Unioncamere del Veneto (Action 2 - Digitization and SMEs - Veneto Region) – 2019

The study conducted shows a progressive increase in the number of companies in the Veneto region that are actively facing the digital transformation process. The quantitative surveys show how over the last three years the share of adopting companies has grown among the manufacturing companies in Veneto.

The company size seems to be a false problem. As we have seen from the data, even the small (and micro) enterprise shows attention towards 4.0 and has started its own path of digitization. From this point of view, the qualitative research allows to highlight how small businesses have a good capacity to face the challenges of digital. Naturally the medium-large enterprises have a greater number of adopted technologies altogether, a choice that is driven by the necessity to face the greater complexity and articulation of their own processes. Instead of the dimension, the element that seems to be more important in explaining the propensity to the investment is the vision and the strategic proactivity of the enterprise. Only the enterprises that have understood (big or small) the potentialities of the technology have decided to start a path of digital transformation.

Industry specificities also emerge in the choice of technological solutions to adopt, where companies adapt and customize 4.0 industry technologies consistent with their process or product. This aspect comes emphasized in evident way also from the qualitative analysis. Both the cases of studies that the focus groups show how enterprises inserted in different chains and operating within different industrial sectors and markets invest giving priority to those technologies industry 4.0 more adapted to overcome the competitive challenges (personalization, efficiency, traceability etc.) and allow to reach the prefixed results. In this sense, the demand for customization of industry 4.0 technologies (4.0 projects) is consistent with this scenario. The digital transformation towards 4.0 has allowed the adopting companies to achieve important results of growth and orientation of the work towards activities with greater added value, opening new market opportunities.

The digital transformation linked to industry 4.0 cannot take place if there has not been an upstream process of investment in ICT technologies. From the study it turns out like the adopting enterprises have developed a path that has often begun much before the advent of the so-called fourth industrial revolution and is connected to technological choices on the front of the integrated managerial systems or the digitalization of the informative processes towards the market (es. CRM). In this sense, the digital transformation more than a radical change represents a further evolution of the technological investment of the company to strengthen its organization and support its competitiveness.

Moreover, it is emphasized the ineluctability of change by those who have undertaken this path or even by companies that are aware of the potential of industry 4.0. If the objective is clear, the path to reach it (to implement the technologies industry 4.0) comes instead often seen like a difficult process, in which lacking above all competences and the management of the organizational change (cultural transformation). It is also important to be able to manage the integration with the technological



solutions already present in the company that represent an important resource - also from the point of view of experience in the management of digitization in the company - but at the same time can become a constraint to the adoption of innovative technologies.

Financial resources are an obstacle to investment, especially for smaller companies, which therefore perhaps need to be given more support in their adoption process. It is no coincidence that smaller companies have benefited significantly from the funding opportunities made available by the Chamber system, at regional and national level. Three categories of firms emerge from the study in this perspective:

- a) innovative companies (or those that have made investments in ICT in the past) that are proactive in seeking funding to support investment paths already planned.
- b) companies aware of the opportunities of 4.0, but with more limited resources, and that can be pushed to invest in relation to the opportunity to exploit a financial incentive.
- c) companies refractory to innovation that have difficulty understanding how 4.0 could help them to relaunch their business.

Casi di studio

Company name	Marmi Serafini
Activities	The company founded in the early 2000s has had a competitive repositioning process starting from the production of marble products to design furniture components. It has invested in marketing and design in order to be able to provide tailor-made and catalog products for national and especially international customers.
Headquarter	Chiampo (VI)
Turnover	1,3 Million Euro (83% export)
Employees	15 (8 in operations)
Technologies 4.0 adopted	Robotics and advanced automation (for cutting and processing - robot with 7-axis arm and finishing machine (polishing)), 3D printing (integrated with 3D model copying machine), cloud.
Motivations	In order to maintain international competitiveness and meet the demands of the reference market, the company needs to constantly renew its technologies (in the last 3 years they have been completely renewed) for the realization of complex products. Another important motivation has concerned the research of internal efficiency.
Results achieved	The company was able to achieve a reduction in production costs, an increase in productivity and above all an increase in the share of customized products as well as entry into foreign markets and an increase in the number of customers. The digital transformation has made it possible to serve both design studios that appreciate technological and productive skills and studies that enhance the interaction mediated by technologies (sharing projects in 3D). In addition, new technologies have improved the quality of the production process for employees.



Internal skills / organizational impact	The organizational impact of the digital transformation has materialized in a redefinition of business processes from design to production. The transparency and sharing of product and process information and traceability of production has increased. It increased the staff in production and the competitive strengthening allows to increase also the other functions (e.g. marketing).
Public funding for Industry 4.0	The funding to which the company has had access concerns both the Industry Plan 4.0 and funding at regional and Chamber of Commerce level. The resources made it possible to make the necessary investments that would not have been possible (or at greater cost). Through the funding the company has borne the costs of starting the digitization and then increase its autonomy.
Challenges	The critical issues concern the availability of suitable professionals in the market as well as the limited internal knowledge. It would also be useful to be able to count on support directly addressed to entrepreneurs to allow a more conscious understanding of the needs and consequences of digital transformation.

Company name	Francom SpA
Activities	Since the foundation of the company in the 60s' there has been a process of evolution and competitive repositioning: from the production of tool containers to the current offer developed since the mid 90s focused on the design and manufacture of vans (modular solutions for a customized product).
Headquarter	Cassola (VI)
Turnover	10 Millions Euro (60% Export)
Employees	50 employees (80 at the group level - 30 in operations)
Technologies 4.0 adopted	Robotics and advanced automation (laser and pantograph), cloud, cybersecurity technologies, IoT. The possibility to implement Artificial Intelligence solutions for the optimization of pallet preparation (configuration) starting from the shipment database (big data) is currently being evaluated. It is also investing to provide mobile devices for its employees and has completed the implementation of an automated warehouse. The company has also integrated its entire sales network through a proprietary VPN network and an internally developed integrated management solution with product configurator for the sales network.
Motivations	The main motivation for the investment concerns the increase of internal efficiency in the organization and management of production, within a framework of maintaining international competitiveness and partly also environmental sustainability (energy savings).



Results achieved	With the wide and systematic development and integration of different digital solutions the company has been able to improve the customer service (1 week between order and assembly), to obtain cost reduction and increase in production and maintain international competitiveness.
Internal skills / organizational impact	The digital transformation process required both an update of existing skills (employees with technical skills) and the hiring of new technical professionals (2 people).
Public funding for Industry 4.0	The company makes systematic use of public funding. It has been able to count on all the incentives provided by the Industry Plan 4.0 and vouchers of the Chamber of Commerce. Financing makes it possible to reduce the costs and risks of independently planned technology investments.
Challenges	The main criticalities found concern above all the process of integration with pre-existing technological solutions and implementation times that involve technology suppliers. The difficulty to find professional figures in the labor market constitutes another criticality as well as the transformation of internal processes that reduces the "historical memory" inherent in the process itself making the worker (less expert) less flexible in the case of errors and problems related to technology.



Go Digital, Go European – the presentation of the EKOI case

Mathilde Mauvais [FR] - risingSUD

Ekoi is a SME created in 2001, based in Fréjus (France) specialized in cycling equipment (clothing, helmets, eyewear, shoes and other accessories). With a successful digital pivot, Ekoi has increased its turnover from 1 to 20 million euros.

Ekoi's successful digital pivot is based on the analysis of their value chain, as it has been described by Porter. The Ekoi team studied their key activities that had a real impact in terms of quality and costs and that'll give a company a competitive edge. They realized progressively that on their value chain, marketing and sales were a major source of gain, not only to maximise actual value but also perceived value for money.

Initially, Ekoi worked with the main retailers and wholesalers on the market to distribute their products. However, they faced several constraints: low bargaining power and hence low margins, difficulties to codevelop products with their partners and constraints regarding their stock management.

In 2008, they started with a showcase website, with a communications focus, as they used it to promote their products, their sponsors and their expertise. But they soon realized a commercial website would be better to increase their web traffic. However, they were still working with retailers and wholesalers. In only two years, 1.5 million euros of income was coming from the website. Ekoi decided to go fully digital. Since then, their income has been steadily increasing to reach 20 million euros today. In 2014, they decided to go international, starting by European markets. Their website made it possible to export their products to different international markets.

Thanks to this digital pivot, Ekoi has effectively cut out the intermediaries and has therefore been able to offer products to its customers at unbeatable value for money, generally 30% to 40% cheaper than the competition.

Not only Ekoi increased actual value, but also perceived value for money using several leverages, including the collaboration of the cyclists and their teams that they sponsor. They sell to regular cyclists, products designed for professional runners. As soon as they are validated by them in competition, they are also sold to the general audience. Ekoi also worked a lot on its website in order to increase the value for their customers. Many of their products can be customised directly online using a configurator that enables the customer to customise its own helmet, eyewear, shoes etc. all with the design of their choice. The XXth century was the era of standardized mass production and mass consumption, symbolized by Ford's quote "you can buy a Ford in any color you want, as long as it's black". Today, Ekoi has well embraced the new era: the era of mass personalization.



Further Inputs from Stakeholders and Partners

Agreement for the Economic Development and Competitiveness of the Lombard System

E-COMMERCE CALL 2020

New markets for Lombard companies

Giada Bagattin [IT] - Unioncamere Lombardia

Given the emergency context due to the COVID-19 epidemiological crisis, in which physical participation in trade fairs is substantially hindered, it is necessary to identify alternative channels to ensure commercial opportunities for Lombard companies' products beyond the domestic market.

Based on this assumption, the Lombardy Region and the Chambers of Commerce of Lombardy, within the framework of the Agreement for the economic development and competitiveness of the Lombardy system, promote the present measure aimed at supporting SMEs that intend to develop and consolidate their position on the markets through e-commerce, by encouraging access to cross border platforms (B2B and/or B2C) and/or e-commerce systems (websites and/or mobile app).

Application could be transmitted from 10.00 on 25th June 2020 to 12.00 on 11th September 2020.

The total resources allocated to the beneficiaries amount to € 2.618.000,00 of which:

- € 1.810.000,00 to be paid by the General Direction Research, Innovation, University, Export and Internationalization of Lombardy Region.
- € 808.000,00 to be paid by the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture of Lombardy (hereinafter referred to as "Chambers of Commerce").

The benefit consists of a non-refundable grant to partially cover expenses incurred (net of VAT) as shown in the table below.

Grantable contribution	Minimum investment	Maximum amount
70% of eligible expenses	€ 4.000	€ 10.000

When submitting the application, the companies concerned must have already identified the product portfolio to be offered on the online sales channel, the foreign target markets and one or more specialized online sales channels, selected in accordance with the product objectives and target markets.

Companies may submit projects relating to the opening and/or consolidation of a commercial channel for exporting their products through access to specialized services for online sale b2b and/or b2c:

- provided by third parties, whether they are retailers, marketplaces, or private sales services, under the condition that the commercial transaction takes place between the company and the buyer final.
- made within the proprietary company portal.

At the end of the planned activities, the projects shall demonstrate the launch of the online sales activity unless the company, when describing the project, is able to demonstrate that the type of products



and/or the markets of reference make it impossible or not convenient to carry out online commercial transactions. In this last case, the e-commerce portal must at least allow the possibility to request a quote or a purchase order.

The following expenditure items for the target markets are eligible for the contribution indicated by the company in the project description:

- a) access to online sales services on the chosen channels (registration fees and any quotas determined as a percentage of the transactions carried out, incurred during the period of validity of the project).
- b) project feasibility analysis, with particular reference to the needs of adaptation administrative, organizational, training, logistic, acquisition of tools and services.
- c) organization of specific interventions of personnel training.
- d) acquisition and use of forms of smart payment.
- e) implementation of a communication, information and promotion strategy for digital exports, with specific reference to the product portfolio, to foreign markets and to the sites of selected online sales (e.g. preparation of product sheets as well as tutorials, photo gallery, webinar, for the presentation of articles and related translations).
- f) design, development and / or maintenance of proprietary e-commerce systems (sites and / or mobile apps), also with regard to synchronization with marketplace channels provided by third parties.
- g) design, development and/or maintenance of AR Business commerce platforms, for example 3D holographic simulators, services, machining and products (visualizing the technical data of interest, examples of machining operations made, etc).
- h) support to the positioning of the offer on the chosen digital commercial channels towards the selected foreign markets.
- i) automation of the transfer, updating and management of articles to and from the web (API - Application Programming Interface).
- j) connection between the operational functionalities of the selected digital sales channel and its CRM systems.
- k) protection and/or registration of trademarks and/or articles included in the product portfolio in the target markets.
- l) digital marketing campaign and promotion activities on digital channels.

The admissible applications are submitted to technical examination, which is conducted by a special Assessment Board (2 representatives of Unioncamere Lombardia, 2 representatives of Regione Lombardia; 1 representative of the competent local Chamber of Commerce) on the basis of the criteria set out in the table below:

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation Parameters	Rating bands	Points
A. Clarity and consistency in the definition of objectives (up to 50 points)	A.1 Level of clarity in the presentation of the project proposal with particular reference to the detailed indication of 1. planned activities; 2. time of realization; 3. objectives;	High	Up to 25
		Medium	Up to 16
		Low	Up to 8



	A.2 Qualitative level of the project proposal with reference to the coherence of the project with respect to the planned objectives: 1. nature and relevance of the requested services and planned events; 2. consistency with the technical and organizational skills and experience of the company;	High	Up to 25
		Medium	Up to 16
		Low	Up to 8
B. Preparation for export of the proposing party (Annex B) (up to 50 points)	B.1 Export experience;	Up to 15	
	B.2 Company organization;	Up to 20	
	B.3 Production capacity;	Up to 15	

To measure the actual level of achievement of the objectives related to this measure, the indicators identified are the following:

- Number of beneficiaries
- Interventions activated
- Interventions carried out
- Committed resources
- Resources disbursed

Results

As indicated in the call notice, the submission of applications closed at 12.00 on September 11th reporting the results shown in the table below. The contribution request was 5.5 times higher than the available budget.

Chamber of Commerce	Number of requests	Amount of grants requested
Bergamo	176	€ 1.540.316,09
Brescia	209	€ 1.786.036,17
Como-Lecco	198	€ 1.654.641,74
Cremona	36	€ 289.794,10
Mantova	69	€ 583.099,95
Milomb	771	€ 6.846.965,24
Pavia	67	€ 517.666,97
Sondrio	20	€ 166.231,00
Varese	104	€ 900.232,29
Total	1650	€ 14.284.983,55



For further information:

Imprese@lom.camcom.it.

<http://www.unioncamerelombardia.it/?/menu-di-sinistra/Bandi---contributi-alle-imprese/Bandi-in-corso-di-rendicontazione/E-commerce-2020---Nuovi-mercati-per-le-imprese-lombarde>

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Quick testing and prototyping of digital innovative products: t2i best practice

**Marco Galanti [IT] - Innovazione e trasferimento tecnologico, t2i –
trasferimento tecnologico e innovazione s.c. a r.l.**

Digital technologies are becoming widespread embedded in a large range of products. The reduced costs of digital sensor and actuators, as well as the compatibility ensured by open standards that became prevalent in the last few years allows to create “intelligent” products of any kind. This represent an opportunity but also a challenge for SMEs: in fact, products are becoming more and more complex, and their development requires a broader range of skills and know-how.

Challenges for SMEs

The first critical challenge that SMEs face is the concept design and first prototyping of the new digital products. It is quite common that, when a traditional SME decide to embed technologies such as IoT in their new product, they find a technical specialist such as an electronic engineering company, and they co-develop the new product.

This approach has some important downsides: the technology become the starting point, replacing the market needs and the user needs. This often leads to a product that doesn't reach the results that were hoped. The challenge is to support SMEs in understanding the technology potential on its own, and also on its own developing the concept, and quickly prototyping it.

PoC lab

T2i activated a PoC (proof-of-concept) lab to solve this problem. The PoC lab was activated in collaboration with a major IoT player (ST Microelectronics), to help SMEs understand the potential of IoT and embedded AI technologies and take benefit from them. The POC approach does not require that anyone presenting the idea of a new application need to have knowledge of microelectronics or electronics.

The lab has several demos of IoT application in various sectors (equipment maintenance, furniture, lighting, etc.), in order to “inspire” possible applications. T2i can also provide support services such as design thinking sessions to support the development of new product or service concepts. The PoC lab is equipped with several demo boards, that can be used to easily prototype the concept once defined, without needing advanced understanding of how these technologies work.

Once the prototype is ready, the company can get in touch with an engineering specialist of its choice for the final design. The preliminary activities ensure a more fruitful collaboration between the companies and the digital technology specialists: the desired results are better defined, as are the requirements, and the feasibility is mostly verified. This translates in a product that better satisfy the



market's needs (i.e. more successful) and often that has a lower time-to-market and development cost.

Open innovation: the role of trust

The collaborations that start between the companies and the technology providers fully qualify as Open Innovation, and as such all the related best practices should be put in place.

Establishing working relationships and, more importantly, subscribing to a work agreement requires a very high level of trust. However, building a mutual trust agreement often represents a very important challenge. For example, the company may think that the technology provider is only trying to force a specific technology into the new product to increase its own profit, not because the final product is improved. Also, the companies may be unwilling to discuss in detail their ideas with the technology providers since they sometimes fear that the technology specialist could develop it on their own or with a competitor. Historically, the lack of trust is one of the most important obstacles in the Open Innovation dissemination process, as many companies are afraid of sharing their own innovative ideas to the global network, allowing competitors to unearth their marketing strategies.

The PoC approach allows companies to have an increased “ownership” of their ideas. Often the concept developed reaches a stage that, even if not ready for IPR protection, can at least ensure an actual proof of priority.

Additionally, Innovation Intermediaries act “trust builders”, supporting collaboration in order to overcome the lack of trust by establishing a trading situation inside their networks. The role of intermediaries’ analysis in the European context suggests that “trust builders” constitute an interesting mechanism to promote new products, processes, and technological and market opportunities through knowledge sharing.

The role of Innovative actors, as Clusters, is increasing in European scenario, because they help SMEs to reach and to expand their networks. Since geographical proximity and regional clustering seem not to be sufficient to guarantee a better OI performance, such organizations need to have easy access to technical tools and expertise, as well as a formally recognized capability and trust of knowledge transfer. An increased collaboration with transregional and transnational external partners is seen as strategic in order to better confront a global competition and gain a direct advantage on the market.



Industry 4.0 Austria – the Platform for Smart Production

Nikolina Grgic [AT] - Plattform Industrie 4.0



The association “Industry 4.0 Austria – the Platform for Smart Production” has successfully managed to bring together different stakeholders both from the national and the regional level.

Industry 4.0 Austria is established as a nonprofit organisation and has set itself the following targets:

- Utilize future developments and innovations in industrial production and minimize risks at the same time
- Create competitive production and high-quality employment at the same time
- Strengthen Austria as a sustainable production location
- Coordinate industry, policy makers, science and media for a successful implementation of Industry 4.0
- Develop strategies and measures for increased research, development and innovation
- Sensibilise and mobilise the community
- Accompany the changes in the production and working environment in collaboration with all major stakeholders
- Identify necessary framework conditions (e.g. in the working environment, qualification, etc.)
- Create synergies by coordinating regional national and international activities
- Exchange experiences, ideas, studies and analyses

The digital transformation of industry has a big impact on the production system and represents a major social and economic challenge. Therefore a strong collaboration between industry, science, regional and national policy makers, trade unions and NGO’s is needed to generate a sustainable added value for all participants. To fulfil those needs and wants of Austrian companies the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK) and representatives of the Austrian social partnership (employee and employer associations) set up a national Platform on Industry 4.0.

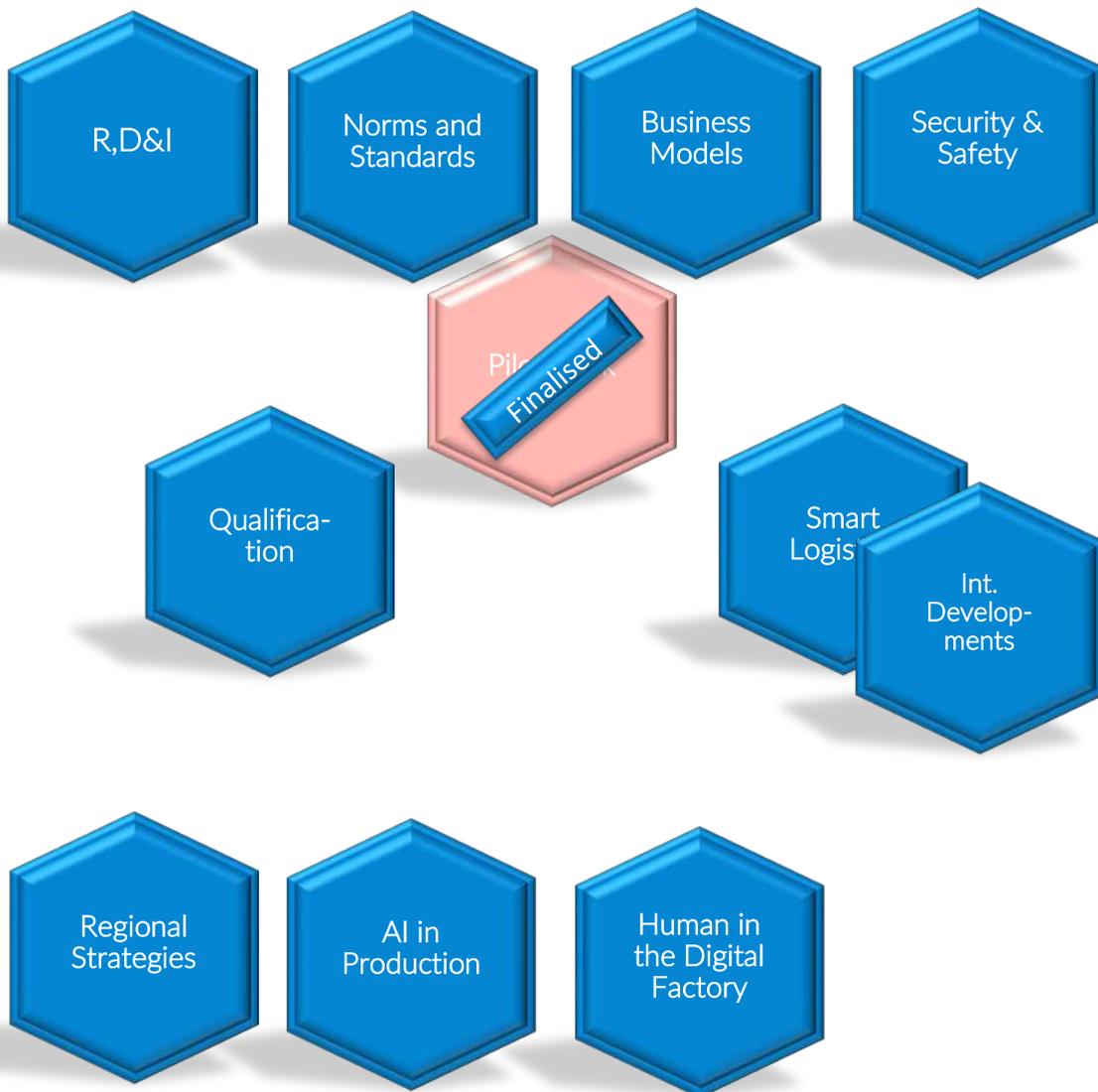
We believe that Industry 4.0 is a societal challenge, because we need a societal accepted development of digitalisation (you have to take the workers also with you, otherwise they might be afraid of losing their jobs.)



The OECD Report „Digital Innovation: Seizing Policy Opportunities“ was published last year in London and our Platform Industry 4.0 is one of the Best Practice examples of this report.

Advice from association Industry 4.0 Austria: CEOs should continuously join further education, because with better Know-How concerning technical topics they're able to act strategically and make more effective decisions.

Expert Groups of association Industry 4.0 Austria:



Innovative start-ups can boost traditional SMEs digital transformation

Maria Sole D’Orazio [IT] - Veneto Innovazione spa

The matching among young and innovative providers and experienced and traditional companies can give a significant boost to the digital transformation.

Public support schemes can leverage the establishment of such cooperation, reaching at the same time the double goal of supporting start-ups in expanding their market and providing mature companies of new technologies and solutions ready to be used to increase their business.

This year the Veneto council approved over 2,000,000 euros of funds for the call for proposal “Support for young digital companies to develop Artificial Intelligence services for the manufacturing sector and beyond”.

The initiative is intended to support start-ups in the development of services / applications / solutions based on Artificial Intelligence to be applied in the made in Italy sectors such as, for example, home furnishings, mechanics, fashion and agri-food.

The call will make it possible to finance projects up to € 120,000 for a maximum of 50 percent. This means that, thanks to the public contribution, about 20 new solutions in the field of Artificial Intelligence could be developed, doubling the funds made available and thus leading to a total investment exceeding 4 million euros.

The services and / or applications based on Artificial Intelligence may refer to various technologies and application areas such as, for example, those related to the following sectors: Robotics, Planning, Speech, Vision, Expert Systems, Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine Learning.

In addition, the call specifies that applicants must have acquired at least two expressions of interest from companies in the Made in Italy manufacturing sector, such as: home furnishings, mechanics, fashion-fashion, agri-food, etc. and the contract must be signed and attached to the fund request.

The financial support will consist of grants.



Practical example digitization

Dr. Gudrun Umbauer [AT] - IGE Institute for Health & Development



The company **offers holistic health concepts** for companies and their employees. Services: Health check based on personal interviews, development of personal concepts work&balance and follow up workshops and personal meetings.

In recent years, well-known companies in Austria have been its customers who deal with the topic of <healthy employees> and they offered in-house service a health expert for their employees. More and more companies recognize the necessity of health promotion in the company as a strategic factor (health management).

The services were exclusively carried out personally on site in the customer's premises, i.e. one-on-one or group discussions were held with a varying number of people. Subsequently, concepts were developed and communicated in personal meetings at the customer's premises.

Due to the COVID19 situation the necessity arose **to find new ways and possibilities** to continue the business activities economically. These were found in the course of **a series of digitalization measures**. Together with digitization experts a concept was developed and as a result a holistic digitization process was started and implemented.

- The total services were digitized – basis is a new platform

It starts with tests (Laboratory chemical analysis= a set for self testing with instructions) and personal questionnaires – customers become an “online programm” for nutrition based on the results of tests and may book online supporting lectures, workshops, seminars via a platform which includes all activities from questionnaires to online workshops, videos and online contacts/conversations

Benefit=replace on-site visits to customers - the services became more independent and flexible of time- the website became an online store for health products

- facebook activities were professionalized

- ImmunXund.Challenge was developed for online use and is already being implemented by first customers (e.g. city of Leoben and city of Kapfenberg) with 50 persons.

At the moment they work on an **E-book which will be a kind of knowledge library** including weekly plans, healthy food combination etc.

These steps made it possible for the company - which exists since 2006 - to continue to work profitably.



Conclusion

Michael Keller [CH] - Applied R&D Service | HES-SO Fribourg | School of Engineering and Architecture Advisory Board Facilitator

The cases presented in this paper and discussed during the policy table on October 7 2020 provide an interesting portfolio of identified challenges and solutions in using digitalisation to boost mature SMEs in launching their second life projects. The figure below summarizes the discussed issues, as documented ad hoc during the policy table.

Figure: Challenges and solutions discussed at the policy table on digitalisation. On-line meeting, October 2020.



Slovenia provided an interesting case study of dedicated support for digitalisation and digital transformation. Success of the programme was significantly associated with a need-based and bottom up approach. The importance of a need-based approach was confirmed by other best practices during the discussion in the on-line policy table (Digital Innovation Hub Western Austria, <https://dih-west.at/>, Digital Tirol, <https://www.digital.tirol/>). In addition, the crucial role of the legislative framework has been stressed during the policy table. Finding ways to fully benefit from the European legislative framework has been identified as an important task for policy makers at the level of member states and regions. While public support and policies have been considered as the basic framework during the discussions, it has also been a recurrent topic to stress the role of markets and private solutions in overcoming digitalisation challenges for SMEs. Learning from other actors on the market, from mature



SMEs having used digitalisation successfully to tap into a second life opportunity, often proves to be most effective. Cases of private platforms available to offer digitalisation support for mature SMEs have also been mentioned. In particular with respect to the set-up of peer learning networks and consulting services, public-private partnerships have appeared as successful approaches. In a similar vein, cluster initiatives can become important tools in addressing digitalisation challenges for mature SMEs.

Overall, a clear picture has emerged from the discussion, which confirms the relevance of the BE-READI ALPS approach. As diverse as the identified challenges, as diverse the required solutions. To tap into the opportunity of digitalisation requires much more than a one-size fits all approach. What is needed to use digitalisation to boost mature SMEs in launching their second life project, are tailor-made services, as they are currently developed within the BE-READI ALPS project.



Input/Output Paper “How to fund innovative projects in European SMEs?”

organized by RISINGSUD, Marseille

11th May 2021

Introduction

Michael Keller [CH] - Applied R&D Service | HES-SO Fribourg | School of Engineering and Architecture Advisory Board Facilitator

There is no doubt that adequate funding (both public and private) can be considered the motor of any successful RDI (research, development and innovation) initiative. As key actors of the Alpine Space economy, SMEs would be particularly important actors to involve in RDI as a basis for a sustainable and inclusive transformation path. Nevertheless, access to funding for innovative projects in SMEs remains challenging today. Two topics have been identified as key stumbling blocks:

First, research, development and innovation do not stop at political borders. Effective industry-research cooperation requires the possibility to work with partners from foreign regions. This paradigm is reflected by the increasing importance of the macroregional approach (represented in the case of the Alpine Space by the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region – EUSALP) within European innovation policy. Today, the macro-regions are undoubtedly recognised as fertile grounds for cross-regional innovation in a broad sense (cultural, social, economic...) and gaining importance within the framework of European funding for the programming period 2021-2027. What all the macro-regional initiatives have in common however, is a certain malaise in moving from identified potentials to actions, in translating opportunities into implementation projects. A persistent funding gap has been experienced in recent years at the level of cross-regional RDI projects, and in particular at the level of projects involving SME participation.⁴

Second, research, development and innovation are, from an economic perspective, topics located at the intersection of free markets and public policy, between private and public funding. A more efficient combination of market-driven innovation support and state intervention is recognized as an untapped potential in the funding of innovation projects in SMEs.

It was the aim of the third policy table of the BE-READI ALPS project to debate these two topics, stumbling blocks and opportunities for innovation driven SMEs at the same time, with the project's observers. The discussion focused on providing an overview of the status quo in terms of cross-regional funding opportunities for innovation projects in SMEs and best practices in combining public and private

⁴See: *New power for the macro-regional innovation motors: a call for a wave of new cross-regional funding schemes in Europe the macro-regional approach*. Position paper HES-SO//FR HEIA-FR / Anteja / VDI/VDE / Bavarian Research Alliance, 2020. Online version: <https://bit.ly/320uQip>.



funding. The speakers then shared the obstacles and challenges they identified in their experience with SMEs. The discussion finally hinted at potential solutions and ideas for the future.

Panel Discussion No.1

How to fund transnational innovation projects

Keynote: Nolwenn Simonot [FR] - Bpifrance, International and Europe Key Account Manager

Eureka is one of the biggest worldwide networks and offers international cooperation, new business opportunities, a high degree of flexibility and freedom to create consortia with a strong-bottom-up approach.

The top technological areas are Electronics, Biological Science, Industrial Manufacturing, Energy technology, Technology for protecting man and Environment.

The benefits of Eureka are: it funds projects that are close to the market, with a positive employment effects for participating enterprises, competitiveness and it works with clusters (3-14 partners, 3-4 countries, 30 months).

Eurostar program (36 Eurostar countries): 1,5 billion euros joined program between Eureka and EU, with a bottom-up approach.

Globalstars is a lean and fast instrument allowing global cooperation for Eureka countries in variable geometrics.

Diagnostic Partenariat Technologic International is an individual support from an expert who helps for partner search, facilitates the draft of the application file, organises your R&D project and assists in negotiating the consortium agreement.

The question is if those costs are eligible costs and if they can be covered by SMEs? *The biggest problem is the demystification.* We have a lot of programs and possibilities - but it is complex. We need to work on demystification to understand that. There should be on the other side the accelerators that are able to give the opportunity of delegation and also the contacts and networks.

We need to cover them and improve the comprehension. We can do something as a public agency but after that we need also other experts (lawyers etc.). The offer should be clear before getting in contact with SMEs and after that we can help to put them in contact.

Christian Dubarry [FR] – BPI France, Head of European Affairs



Eureka and Regional authorities work together with SMEs. One of the barriers for transnational cooperation is that there is benefit of the collaboration only by choosing a strategy (e.g. technologies provided by partners) or it is better to buy a technology or to export. To get a better market access and set up collaboration it is better to find partners through networks or getting support by private experts or public networks. It is not so easy that they draft a collaboration to finance R&D activities. *It's important to support SMEs in collaboration.*

A critical path is the availability to get services for SMEs to get over those barriers.

Most of the most promising funding projects are midcap partnership projects and are transnational, but the point is that there are not enough transnational projects of SME, that there is not a critical number and therefore they cannot find the relevant contacts and services.

Conclusion: There are many projects of cooperation and there are also private and public funds. From the side of Eureka we are preparing them; there is also the Invest EU program (equity funds) and projects in cloud sector and others of public interest. The point is that some programs are overlapping, it is complex, and complexity should be adapted to the needs.

Natalia Garcia Mozo [DE] - Bavarian Research Alliance GmbH, Head of Unit SMEs Advisory Services

In the framework of the European funding program for R&D we are a funding centre, we support scientists to participate in research. We are partner of EEN, and have a long-term client approach, giving information on potential funding, assessment, panelling service and help in preparing a competitive proposal.

There are barriers to go international with competitive products.

There is a lack of demand, and SME's do not trust the services. In the majority of companies, private consultants have to be engaged. They work together with that companies and provide support services.

Barriers: companies and funding authorities speak different languages - public authorities provide funding projects and companies on the other hand implement strategies. But strategies have a long-term basis, fundings have a short-term basis. *SME's don't have time to wait, they are looking for impact and results and commercialisation.* Example: Project Slam (small funding programs)

Not all the young entrepreneurs are open to internationalisation. Even the teams put their focus completely on developing products so that they need coaching, mentoring, professional orientation and support for the other steps of the projects.

They don't have time to adapt the strategy in projects. They are no proposal writers.



Public authority: bilateral programs in the border regions are not so bilateral but have different companies and public authorities. They should give more incentives to not make funding complicated.

Steven Frigerio [IT] - APRE, Horizon Europe, National Contact Point European Innovation Council

Agency for Horizon Europe and participates within EEN: Focus on assisting companies within the framework of Horizon and assist and guide them in the programs and coordination activities in the National Innovation Council. They provide support to SMEs to submit proposals in National Innovation Council and Innovation funding. And they collaborate with transnational projects.

Challenges for SME: they are more agile but don't have a clear strategy and don't have enough resources in a global perspective.

Many of the SME's have regional or national basis in doing business. One of the challenges is, that the process to find a partner doesn't happen immediately, it takes a lot of time and support and also a lot of understanding what exactly they need.

There are low resources to reinforce the importance of cooperation and forces to get a "domino" effect. A matchmake gives a lot of opportunities and helps to find partners.

Michael Walch [AT] -FFG (Austrian Research Promotion Agency), Eureka Programme Coordinator

There is an up-down approach to support innovation inside Horizon und the funding provided by EU and a bottom-up approach by funding provided nationally. The support has two directions.

EEN helps to connect companies, organisations and innovations hubs. *A lot of innovation is created by small companies!*

There is the challenge to have time and good actors to find the right partners. It is also a challenge to bring the project on paper so that it could be understood by everyone, but on the same time it should be innovative. It requires a lot of resources and a lot of understanding in the companies. And this requires a lot of knowledge.

For the further challenge we should be able to speed up the process to launch a call and start a project. A year is quite too long. It needs also the citizens engagement.

Conclusions and recommendations to think about:

- A lot of innovation is created by small companies!
- SMEs are agile but don't have a clear strategy and don't have resources in a global perspective.
- We need a critical number of projects to offer appropriate services according to the needs
- To speed up the process to launch a call and start a project



- How we can help SME's with appropriate services according to their needs.
- Make it simple!

Panel Discussion No.2

How to combine public and private funding to support innovation projects?

Keynote: Valérie Roché Melin [FR] - Région Sud investissement, General Secretary

Région Sud investissement is the first equity fund in France with a capacity to invest 136 M € to fund European SME that are located in South France.

The key is the easy access to public funding; compared to typical European funding, their equity is easier to get. Région Sud Investissement believes public/private investment is accurate because it is a long-term investment with a leverage effect for funding of 1 to 8.

Valérie Rocher Melin underlined the importance of partnership:

- Co-investment with more than 100 partners (regional, national and international investors)
- *accelerators and incubators to support companies after they have received the funding.*

Panel discussion

Panelists:

Marco Rampin, Alessandra Baldan - Incentives and credits Area, Veneto Sviluppo
Arndt Upfold - Deputy Head of Unit Start-ups and Business Transfer Ministry of Economics, Labour and Housing Baden-Württemberg
Michael Kerschbaumer - Head of EEN, SFG

It needs to be justified that State funded projects for innovative SME kick in and interrupt the natural market force (because of market failures etc.).

What is the experience of a combination of public & private funding for SME (challenges, status quo etc.)?

Stefan Fischer thinks that a national contact point for SME, that are interested in the EIC Accelerator Programme (publicly funded) also includes Equity finance (Venture Capital). *Switzerland struggles with the fact that they are no longer part of the Horizon Europe Programme.*

There is a strong demand of SME for their services (but also room for improvement, not all of them are aware of the existing projects).

Arndt Upfold says that southwest Germany has a lot of medium-sized companies (Daimler, Bosch etc). They are not so visible for their startups unlike Berlin for example. They have started an initiative called Startup BW, hoping this might change something for pre-seed Startups. The goal is to make the startups investor-ready. So far there are 130 startups in the pre-seed programme.



Its early-stage financing that completes the financing chain for start-ups in Baden-Wuerttemberg to make early-stage start-ups ready for financing.

- Scale-up orientated and innovative start-ups in future technology sectors are supported in order to develop a business model for innovative products or services in every branch.
- Startup BW Pre-Seed can cover a financing volume up to 200.000 € (up to 400.000 € in certain exceptional cases)
- 20 % private co-financing required (business angels, corporates, Venture capitalists, etc.)
- the grant equals a convertible loan

Michael Kerschbaumer says that many *SME are not ready to face private investors, there is the need for a funding programme to make startups investor ready, so that they become ready to face potential investors*, also co-invest with private investors, and share the risk with investors.

Marco Rampin mentions the *need for a combination of private & public funding*, manage financial facilitation and grant facilitating loans.

Stefan Fischer is being asked, **why is Switzerland so successful in EIC?** There are many European startups that fund in Switzerland. Also, there are excellent schools and technology parks as well as an active startup company scene. But there is room for improvement: applicants that don't know how to protect their IP, approaching investors with an appropriate pitch etc.

Arndt Upfold is then being asked, **what are the challenges in Germany?**

Usually there were 2 different programmes: 1. Grants & 2. Venture Capital (banking business)

Startup BW is something in between. Before they started the programme they calculated that they would lose about 50% of the money because they invest in risky young startups. But so far (after 2 years) there are already 10 exits and only 1 startup "lost", but it's too early to give a conclusion yet.

Michael Kerschbaumer is being asked **what can we do to improve?** Go in between as Arndt Upfold told but also another possibility is to *integrate "semi rich people" that are willing to invest money in startups* (not really business Angels). They could help these people to invest in startups with little ticket sizes or crowd funding to decrease the risk. It's difficult to mobilize this money (it needs a lot of organization & trust). This is not tackled yet in Austria but has a great potential.

Marco Rampin suggests to provide a mix of funds of banks (maximum interest) & public funds (zero interest).

Stefan Fischer says that typical investors complain that they are not interested in small investments, but *combining small investors in a larger structure would be a great idea*. Combining smaller IP assets into something bigger has also a great potential.



Universities should be more active in creating IP rather than in “holding” and selling the IP back to founders/students.

- ➔ Fragmented situation: IP is traded & institutionalized; it’s important to try to find a solution of the financial market to create an interesting market for IP.

Valerie Roché-Melin says that they started small with their project (with 24 M€ from Europe and Région Sud), worked on creating private & public partnerships and created a strong network of private investors (business angels, family offices etc.). They have money to invest but not time to search for investment cases, they do it for them, they also did a lot of communication (roadshows, website, ...).

Should we create markets that are more efficient for IPR? IP is mandatory for them, when they started, they only financed innovative SME (now it is no longer mandatory, since they also support industrial SMEs) and work with public structures that help with IP.

Arndt Upfold says that *monetizing IP is a problem*. Patents are important, some universities really do support their startups, others make it harder for their students to receive an investment.

Stefan Fischer mentions that *there must be the courage to see the value of IP, to give Universities the possibility to monetize their invention*, combine IP from different universities into sth. valuable; it would get more successful then.

Michael Kerschbaumer adds that Austrian Universities are reluctant to give the IP out, they don’t hand over the IP to the inventor. It’s bad for all of them, investors do not want to invest if the university holds the IP which results in a lose-lose situation for everybody.

Conclusion

The interventions and discussions at the third BE-READI ALPS policy table have confirmed that cross-regional innovation cooperation is a big opportunity for SMEs, still partly untapped. Offers are available for SMEs interested in getting involved in cross-regional innovation projects, in particular through programmes such as Eureka and Eurostars, but also through targeted SME support as currently provided by many of the organisations reunited at this policy table.

Nevertheless, the participants of the policy table have also identified important remaining challenges and barriers for SMEs. In a nutshell, it remains a complex issue for SMEs to find the right partners in the right projects (“projects that match an SME’s strategy) with the right timing. Pathways to improved access for SMEs to cross-regional innovation projects include more efficient match-making services, better communication and “translation” between the mindset of the innovation funding world and SME’s strategies, faster decision processes and more flexible cooperation programmes. In this last regard it would be particularly interesting to increase efforts for synchronizing calls of existing regional



programmes (which are often closer to regional SME ecosystems than big European cooperation programmes) across borders.⁵

A big potential has also been identified in the field of combining private with public funding opportunities. Best practices have been presented in the different interventions at the policy table. It nevertheless remains a challenge to combine small individual innovative SME projects into larger structures interesting for private equity investors. It has also been stressed that improvements for the future need to take intellectual property issues into account. There is a clear need for a systematic value management, a long-term vision regarding the exploitation of intellectual assets and appropriate strategies to develop well managed patent portfolios.

⁵ See the Innovation Express 2021 for a successful example of synchronized calls for SME innovation projects across regions: <https://innovation-express-2021.b2match.io/>.



Input/Output Paper “TOWARD THE GREEN TRANSITION - An ecosystem ready to boost the business resilience”

The written presentation of cases selected for the on-line meeting

March 24th, 2022

Introduction

Michael Keller [CH] - Applied R&D Service | HES-SO Fribourg | School of Engineering and Architecture Advisory Board Facilitator

Green Transition is on everyone's lips. The European Green Deal and the incentives it offers to embark on transformative routes nowadays shape the outlook of businesses, researchers or policymakers alike. Obviously, an omnipresence of an idea in the public discourse can be the sign of either an abundance of real opportunity or of hot air and empty talk and does, most often, combine aspects of both. How to draw the line? How to identify the potential for real value creation, while avoiding to be drawn into the jungle of ever-growing mountains of reports never read, concepts never tested, and strategies never implemented?

Two lessons from recent experience:

First, in order to come to fruition, to translate into increased competitiveness of businesses and regions, green transition needs to be understood from the business perspective. If green transition is to live up to its promises, it is insufficient to be contended with the term as an attractive go-to slogan for research proposals or a fancy selling argument for old wine in new bottles. If it is to prove successful as an economic principle, the undisputable environmental and societal benefits of turning away from a fossil-fuel based economy need to be coupled with the potential for value creation at the business level.

Second, it seems obvious that in front of a global challenge such as green transition, forces need to be joined, opportunities need to be tackled together, at whatever geographical level is best suited to exploit specific complementarities and synergies conducive to innovative solutions. In this context, it is worth noting that the importance of European macro-regions in the context of transformation, innovation and climate change is growing. Macro-regions are indeed recognised as fertile grounds for cross-regional innovation in a broad sense (cultural, social, environmental, economic...). 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 implementation projects.

It is on these two fronts - reinforcing the business perspective and developing solutions for improved cross-border cooperation within macro-regions – that this fourth policy table of the BE-READI ALPS project has provided insights to take a step further towards real implementation of green transition within the Alpine region.



Institutional insights

Speech: Santo Romano [IT] - Santo ROMANO, Director Economic Policies, human capital and Community planning Area, Veneto Region

The Veneto Region has participated in the work of EUSALP since the definition of the first collaboration agreements, prepared between 2011 and 2012 with the involvement of the Regions, the Member States and the European Commission.

The fundamental objective on which EUSALP is called upon to engage is the identification of initiatives that are capable of responding to the great challenges of the Alpine area. These are phenomena whose repercussions go beyond national and administrative borders and, therefore, require joint and synergistic interventions which, at the same time, know how to take into due consideration the specificities that characterize individual territories.

What is expected from these initiatives is a strengthening of the ability to "create a system", sharing experiences and skills, deepening knowledge on the issues to be addressed and investigating possible innovative solutions in terms of actions in the area, definition of shared strategies and policies.

The Veneto Region, recognizing the potential of this approach, has therefore worked to spread the knowledge of these cooperation tools and has encouraged the involvement in the work of relevant subjects in the technical and scientific fields, close to operators and stakeholders in the area. and with a consolidated experience of cooperation in the transnational field. Even during the Interreg programming for the 2014-2020 period, Veneto has frequently touched the themes of innovation and support for companies in their process of evolution, the topic of today's meeting.

In the "Alpine space" Program, the Veneto subjects participated in 8 projects, in 5 cases with the role of leader, investigating a wide range of issues, such as the application of S3 strategies for the growth and innovation of business clusters, the introduction of digital technologies in the manufacturing sector, the use of digitalization of processes for the transition to the circular economy, support for the generational transition of companies in the Alpine area, the use of open data for the definition of targeted products and services.

The "BE-READI ALPS" project, coordinated by Veneto Innovazione SpA, an in-house company of the Region, is investigating possible ways of supporting mature companies in order to increase their competitiveness and resilience with respect to market turbulence and possible phenomena, including not predictable, which can impact their market position and, sometimes, their very survival. In addition to the activation of support services to companies in terms of business redefinition, product and process



innovation, support in the search for new financial partners, one of the important aspects of the project is the provision of moments of involvement of the decision makers of the area, through the policy tables, in order to investigate possible common actions in support of these realities.

The results of this, as of the other projects mentioned, will contribute to strengthening the productive fabric of the Alpine area through an increase in its competitiveness and the ability to update strategies and processes as a consequence of the evolution and changes of the reference contexts and increasingly binding requirements for environmental protection.

New perspectives are thus opening up which, by offering growth opportunities to the economic and productive fabric of the area, foster the reduction of the environmental impact and the contextual maintenance of a thriving social fabric, particularly relevant for the Alpine area. Through the Veneto representatives in the EUSALP working groups, including Veneto Innovazione, the results of the projects are now made available to the Strategy, with the aim of amplifying its scope and identifying other tools, more financially equipped than the Interreg Programs, which allow the large-scale replication of those that have proved most effective. It is no coincidence that the regulations relating to the Cohesion Policy for the period 2021-2027 also bring the request to align the various financial instruments with the objectives of the European macro-regional strategies, strengthening their synergies, through an *embedding process*.

Veneto participates in both EUSALP and EUSAIR. PRs can contribute to the objectives of the Strategies with various potential forms of embedding, such as the identification of coherent and relevant actions, promotion of shared objectives, promotion of coordinated actions with other partners. For EUSALP, the main challenges for the Alpine area concern the green and digital transition, depopulation, smart villages, sustainable mobility, adaptation to climate change and energy transition, spatial planning, tools for innovation and green business, cultural and natural heritage. Embedding in the 2021-2027 Veneto ERDF will take place through the innovations brought about by collaborations between research companies, in line with RIS3. The two Objectives of the ERDF 201-2027 that make a contribution to the EUSALP strategy are the Objective 1 and the Objective 4, which fall under Priority 1: "A more competitive and intelligent Europe through the promotion of an innovative and intelligent economic transformation and of regional connectivity to ICT ". With regard to the specific objective 1 "To develop and strengthen research and innovation capacities and the introduction of advanced technologies", the Veneto Region intends to primarily support innovation and research processes focused on the low-carbon economy, on adaptation to climate change and on the circular economy, in synergy with European policies. The Region therefore intends to strengthen research and innovation (in collaboration) between companies and research organizations.

The action provides for the financing of industrial research and experimental development projects implemented by partnerships made up of companies and research organizations set up in one of the forms governed by the Regional Law n. 13/2014, namely: Regional Innovative Networks (RIR), Industrial Districts, Business Combinations. These are collaborative research activities between companies of different sizes, universities and research organizations, consistent with the strategic areas of the Veneto RIS3.



The specific objective 4 "Developing the skills for intelligent specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship" provides for an animation activity on the territory, or an informative and training action on the issues of RIS3, involving the largest possible number of stakeholders, by implementing and / or creating functional tools for continuous and systematic listening as well as the exchange of information, for example through specific digital platforms that the Veneto Region will place at the service of the territory. As part of this objective, initiatives will also be undertaken to accompany the processes of technology transfer necessary for the industrial transition, within companies and at different levels of management.

The set of interventions is functional to Pillar no. 1 of the EUSALP strategy which aims to strengthen sustainable development and innovation in the Alpine macro-region of which Veneto is an integral and active part for a large part of its territory. The planned ERDF interventions are attributable to at least three EUSALP Action Groups and the related areas of intervention: 1) effective research and innovation; 2) economic potential; 3) labor market, education and training.

The EUSALP and EUSAIR macro-regional strategies will also be taken into account in the implementation of the priorities provided for by the PR ESF +. In particular, the ESF + contributes to the EUSALP strategy through actions in support of training and qualified employment in the Alpine area, promotes the integration of labour markets, dual training, approach to typical mountain activities and jobs " green ", the mobility and study trips of students, the learning of languages in the Alpine area, enhancing the role of schools, universities and research centers in an educational process connected with society.

Speech: Roberto Marcato [IT] - Councillor for the Economic Development and Energy, Veneto Region

After two years of emergency due to the pandemic, today we find ourselves managing the fallout from the current difficult geopolitical situation which is putting a strain on the competitiveness of businesses and the very stability of our economic systems.

As recently declared by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, the need to accelerate towards energy independence is now an increasingly urgent requirement.

We have also now realized that we live in an economy that was not planned to cope with constant emergencies. The imperative to strengthen our ability to be "resilient" is evident, as is the need to support businesses to continue to function in the face of unforeseen challenges and increasingly major disruptions.

The European Commission took the first steps towards energy independence by proposing on 8 March 2022 a draft plan to free Europe from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030, starting with gas, following



the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The plan "REPowerEU: joint European action for safer, more sustainable and more affordable energy" outlines a series of measures aimed at responding to rising energy prices in Europe and replenishing gas stocks for the coming winter.

In this complex scenario, we are also preparing to launch important relaunch programs such as the PNRR and the Regional Programs, programs that, as never before, must absolutely be able to grasp and anticipate the great challenges of the future, including that of the Green Transition. of the most important.

The Veneto Region, we all know, is a region that is the protagonist of the miracle of the north east and of national wealth, just as it is well established that the development and growth of our entire production system is based on small and medium-sized enterprises. For us, therefore, the Green Transition can only pass-through awareness and therefore the need to adapt stimulus and support measures to this context.

Therefore, in order for sustainability, energy efficiency and the drive to produce with green sources not to remain a mere slogan, it is necessary to start with companies and their ability to change and maintain their competitiveness on the markets intact.

There is no miraculous recipe but we are trying to give targeted answers. I mention only three:

- encourage a cohesive recovery by the entire ecosystem: businesses, the research system, the business support organisations and associations. There must be a convergence of intentions and initiatives, there is no room for individualism and fragmentation. This is the concept that has led us since the last programming to focus on Regional Innovative Networks, intended as strategic partnerships between companies, universities, associations and public bodies. Our system must be strongly oriented towards innovation, through a strong integration between the scientific and knowledge system, the production system and the development of collaborative business networks.

- starting from the territory to identify how to strengthen our system. In our path to update the Regional Strategy for Research and Innovation for Smart Specialization, we wanted to give ourselves the time to listen to our territory, especially in the "entrepreneurial discovery" phase. More than 600 people participated in our forums, there were more than 300 expressions of interest to contribute to the definition of our strategy and the same number of responses also from citizens and entrepreneurs to propose new development trajectories or update existing ones. The work is continuing through the prioritization phase for which we will once again return to the territory. A matrix logic is emerging from all this which, in addition to strategic areas, intersects with priority drivers for S3: Digital Transition, Green Transition but also Human Capital and Innovation Services. For us, digitization and green growth go hand in hand with the well-being of people and the social dimension and services that transform innovation into new products, processes and services for the market.

- launch strategic projects to explore and push towards emerging technologies or technologies with a high economic impact. In synergy with the Strategic Committee set up by the Veneto Region to outline the local development lines of the initiatives supported by the PNRR, the regional S3 also foresees strategic missions where to aim. Bioenergy, hydrogen, biotechnology, quantum technologies, space



technologies and artificial intelligence: these are the issues that we place as beacons of our research and innovation system to help companies be more competitive.

Obviously, our strategy and our "recipes" will be more effective if we are able to harmonize them with those of neighbouring regions: we have seen how a unified and cohesive response can help to overcome the challenges we face. So, my hope that this moment of discussion can truly be an opportunity to discuss and start a common path. To achieve the planned objectives of the 2021-2027 cohesion policy for "A resilient, greener and low-carbon Europe", with the strategic choices that have been included in the ERDF Regional Program, the Veneto Region, built on the basis of a close institutional dialogue and partnership with the Veneto area and approved by the Veneto Regional Council on 15 February 2022 and currently being negotiated with the national and European level, it is intended to make a concrete contribution to achieving the objectives of the "Green Deal European" by promoting constant support for the competitiveness of Veneto businesses.

In the field of energy efficiency, Veneto has achieved the objectives set at national level already in 2017, in line with the indications of the Regional Energy Plan (2017) and the Regional Strategy for Sustainable Development, (2018), consistent with its once with the National Strategy. We will continue on this path through investments in energy efficiency for companies, also through the experimentation of more innovative measures, such as energy efficiency combined with renewable energy. The improvement of air quality and the reduction of polluting emissions are objectives that we intend to pursue through the resources of the ERDF Operative Program 21-27 also through research, development and innovation activities, to identify new and effective solutions through research and development activities. For a greater exploitation of energy sources, it is planned to create new Energy Communities to serve residential, industrial and logistic areas, using systems built by public entities.

Also, in order to give continuity to the 2014-2020 initiatives and in consideration of the pillars considered by the EUSALP Strategy, there is a need to further strengthen the connection between companies and the world of research, public and private, to expand the number of beneficiaries who thanks to public funds can initiate collaborations and innovative projects. The strengthening of the 2014-2020 interventions in favour of districts, Regional Innovative Networks (RIR) and other forms of aggregation between companies and the research system is placed in this direction, a model that allows even small-sized companies to enter the paths of innovation necessary to safeguard the competitive advantage of our production chains by pushing towards the objectives of intelligent specialization that we have agreed with the territory in the new Regional Specialization Strategy that we are defining in these days.

The interventions are therefore oriented towards the evolution from a traditional production structure to a system more oriented towards innovation, digitization and sustainability in all production, commercial and service sectors, even with new business models, compatible with respect for identity of the mountain areas and with the opportunities that can be seized.



Speech: Achille Spinelli [IT] - Councillor for the Economic Development, Research and Labour, Autonomous Province of Trento

We are currently experiencing a peculiar and crucial phase of evolution of the economy and society. Sustainability, understood in all its meanings - energy, environmental, economic and social - has now become a key word in the evaluation and planning of investments and public and private initiatives.

In line with the European Green Deal and the goal of making Europe climate neutral by 2050, there is a need to transform the economy through green technology, creating sustainable industries and transport and reducing pollution. This is a demanding challenge, which however also presents the opportunity to relaunch the competitiveness of businesses and the economic sector as a whole. In this context, all economic and social actors, from public institutions to businesses, must make their own contribution.

Public investments and financing represent a fundamental element to accompany companies and economic actors in this transformation process. The ecological transition is one of the pillars of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which allocates approximately 60 billion euros to the themes of the circular economy, energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable mobility and environmental protection. These resources, together with the other funding provided at all levels of government - European, national and regional - must pursue homogeneous long-term sustainability objectives in a coordinated way.

Public support for research and innovation is essential to further develop green technologies, encourage the creation and dissemination of new circular economy models and incentivize private investments, ultimately accelerating the ecological transition. Through the Multiannual Research Program of the current legislature and the updating of the Intelligent Specialization Strategy, the Autonomous Province of Trento has defined investment priorities consistent with the resources, skills and peculiarities of the local socio-economic fabric.

First, the Province of Trento intends to focus on the circular bioeconomy and smart agriculture. I refer in particular to the reuse of waste and by-products from agriculture, the food industry and wood processing, the creation of bio-based products, the production of biogas and biomass, the use of sustainable materials in production cycles. and the applications of intelligent technologies in agricultural production processes. Closely connected to these objectives is that of the sustainability of production processes through the development of green biotechnologies, the reduction of the use of chemicals and water resources and the rational use of materials and packaging.

Another central theme in the provincial strategy is that of renewable energy and energy efficiency. Here the optimization of renewable energy production technologies, the development of storage systems such as batteries and hydrogen production, the creation of intelligent energy management systems and the energy efficiency of processes and buildings emerges as a priority.



Finally, an important goal of the provincial strategy is the transformation of the manufacturing system through prototyping and 3D printing and additive manufacturing systems, which contribute to making the use of materials more efficient and reducing industrial waste.

To achieve these objectives, the Autonomous Province of Trento pursues a policy aimed at creating innovation poles capable of offering the skills, resources and infrastructures necessary to develop and market innovative products and services and to initiate virtuous processes of competitive growth. The innovation poles are groupings of SMEs, large companies, innovative start-ups and research organizations active in specific technological or application fields which, in addition to providing tools and coworking spaces, foster the creation of an ecosystem that is fertile for innovation. through processes of technology transfer and exchange of knowledge and skills.

In this regard, I have to mention some of the most successful interventions. First of all, I want to mention the Manufacturing Project - Green Innovation Factory, which saw the conversion of a former tobacco processing plant in Rovereto into an industrial innovation center in the sectors of eco-sustainable construction, renewable energy, technologies for the environment and natural resource management. The site covers a covered area of about 70,000 square meters, and hosts a cluster made up of startups, companies, research centers, training facilities and public administration services, with the aim of stimulating collaboration and establishing a reference. in the clean tech sector, at national and European level. Within this structure there are spaces for office use, production spaces and equipped laboratories. In addition, established companies can take advantage of an acceleration and consolidation program, targeted information desks and concessions for the purchase of technological systems. To date, about 80 start-ups and innovative companies have decided to settle at the hub.

To this it must be added that the project that will soon see the start-up of the TESSLAB infrastructure, created by the Autonomous Province of Trento in collaboration with Trentino Sviluppo, the University of Trento and the Bruno Kessler Foundation. The project involves the setting up at the Manufacturing hub of five advanced laboratories in the field of information technology, modelling, and the development and optimization of energy storage systems and distributed energy systems. Educational, research and prototyping projects will soon be activated in these laboratories, with significant expected repercussions in terms of innovative capacity and entrepreneurial attractiveness.

Another excellence of the Trentino area is represented by the Mechatronics Center, which hosts many innovative companies active in the sector. The peculiarity of the pole is the ability to integrate in a single place not only the world of research and business, but also that of training. In fact, start-ups, companies, research centers and industrial accelerators coexist in the mechatronics hub, as well as university departments and higher technical institutes. This allows for the creation of a true innovation chain, from training to the design and validation of innovative products and services. In the mechatronics center there is also an advanced mechanical prototyping laboratory with cutting-edge machinery and equipment in the fields of 3d printing and laser cutting, electronics and metrology. The laboratory, called ProM facility, allows companies to benefit from advanced technological services and rapid prototyping, lightening the burden of investments and accelerating the innovation process.

Before concluding, I would like to say a few words on two issues that are extremely important for me: the wood supply chain and hydrogen.



The wood production and processing sector in Trentino is highly developed and can make a significant contribution to the ecological transition. The Province of Trento has recently opened a working table with all stakeholders to revitalize this sector and enhance its role in the context of the circular bioeconomy and transition. Numerous ideas have emerged here on which the Province, in collaboration with local actors, intends to work in the coming years. I refer in particular to the use of wood biomass for the production of energy - through the production of syngas - and for the development of biocompatible materials - for example, through the production of environmentally friendly materials and packaging.

As regards the second point, the role of green hydrogen as an important energy vector in the energy transition process is now universally recognized. A suggestive option to which the Province of Trento is looking with interest is the production of green hydrogen from woody biomass through the prior transformation of the same into biogas - around which various innovative technologies are being born. The possibility of combining the reuse of waste materials with the production of clean energy represents an excellent example of economic transformation in the context of the ecological transition.

I conclude my speech with a message that I believe is fundamental: to build a clean and sustainable economy it is necessary that all relevant actors - from research to businesses, from citizens to public institutions - work together to transform the society in which we live.

Keynote: The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) – A Framework for cooperation

David MATZEK-LICHTENSTEIN -DG Regio, European Commission

A 'Macroregional strategy' is an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, which may be supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds among others, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion. The main elements to be picked up from from this definition are: framework, European Council, and geographical area.

“Framework” because the strategy has not a fixed contents defined by the EU, it could be filled in by the participant regions. The second, to be stressed is the endorsement by the “European Council”. This means that if we go for asking for political legitimacy, this is really the maximum, we in Brussels can get those by the European Council. And third, the “geographical area”. That means that it's really tailored to your regions and should be built on a territorial approach.

A “Macroregional Strategy” does not require new regulations but it is based on cooperation. No new institution has been created but the strategy is supported by nine Actions Groups, that includes experts and specialists coming by the participant regions, that have the role to gather and work on the topics faced by the area and the possible solutions. Although no specific funds are available for the



macroregional strategy, 98 EU programmes are available in the area and could be used. Moreover, three financial dialogue networks have been created: Energy Transition, Sustainable Mobility and Digital Technology. In addition, all the Regional Programs have now to take into account the EUSALP objectives in their own program so that the connection is even more secured. At EU level the cross-linkages will be also in the future reinforced. For instance, the programme LIFE has recently launched a call addressing the macroregional strategies under the sub-programme “Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation”

To benefit from the strategy, there are many possibilities: the Actions group are very proactive and accessible, the regions have shown a strong interest in using the strategy and the involvement of the political level is pretty significant and ideas coming from the different territories are collected and shared quickly for the benefit of the area.



Panel Discussion No.1

»The business and ecosystem perspective«

Keynote: Maria Sole D’Orazio [IT] – Veneto Innovazione spa, BE-READI ALPS LP

BE-READI ALPS⁶ tested a set of services and tools to support companies in launching second life projects, reinforcing their capacity to react to sudden market changes. During the project implementation more than 500 companies were involved in the activities and more than 100 participated to the pilot action.

From the experience some key points can be extracted:

- Companies often showed unclear strategy and lack of dedicated processes (human and financial resources)
- Private investors have different targets (start-ups and very structured and well-established companies); public schemes are often too complex for SMEs (EU level) or not focusing on transnational cooperation (regional level)
- Companies and supporting institutions are living in a «survival status» which prevent the planning of long-term strategies and investments
- Companies succeeded in launching an innovation process generates virtuous cycle unlocking an innovation process also in their value chain
- A supportive local ecosystem can help companies in building strategic paths and to check the project feasibility before investments are launched
- Established transnational networks among ecosystems are powerful sources of connections and opportunities for companies
- We have to learn as area to go further than the resilience, we have to become “antifragile”.

⁶ To know more about BE-READI ALPS: <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/be-readi-alps/en/home>



Panel discussion

Panelists:

Anna GIORGI - UNIMONT University of Milan and EUSALP AG1 Team Leader,
Bernhard KÖLMEL - School of Engineering, Pforzheim University, Birgit WEIHS-DOPFER - Cluster Manager Renewable Energies Tyrol, Standortagentur Tirol GmbH

In your experience how we could better support companies toward Green Transition?

Birgit Weihs-Dopfer thinks is valuable sharing experiences and putting together the key players. One of the first action of the new Sustainability Strategy of Tyrol for example was the launch of a platform to streamline services from all the key players to support companies and municipalities. The platform is the first point of contact and it works to initiate projects and launch new initiatives. From these project lessons learnt and guideline could be extracted also to inspire other companies. One of the issues that emerged was the lack of consultants in Tyrol that can efficiently support companies in the transition. A second initiative launched was the "Clean Alpine Region" project that supports Tyrolean tourism regions in implementing measures in the areas of climate protection, sustainability and energy and in further developing as climate-friendly regions. The "certification" of touristic destination is really important because the impact of ecological measures ensure an intact environment on which the Tyrolean tourism offer is based, help to reduce the adaptation costs associated with progressive climate change and increase the innovation potential and thus the competitiveness of companies. Tyrolean regions benefited from the project also because they learn cooperating together, building mutual trusts among the key players.

Bernhard Kölmel presents the outcomes of a pilot action conducted in the frame of an Alpine Space funded project: Circular 4.0⁷. The pilot was done in the region of the Black Forest which is an area well developed from an industrial point of view but where there are no big companies. The pilot in fact involved 25 SMEs which were assessed to check their maturity in terms of digitalization and "circular maturity". The results showed that, although there is a general interest and commitment in going green, the economic pressure and the need to "survive" prevail in companies' priorities. Especially in the smaller companies there is not a high knowledge how to proceed, how to concrete set up the operation process toward green transition. This results often in a "greenwashing" approach more than in a deep change. It has been noticed a correlation among digital and circular maturity that has been explained with the fact that companies that in the past years incorporated digitalization have already a strategic background and knowledge to approach also the green transition. Companies that have not built this experience have to start "from scratch" generating good practice they can break down strategic green goals into operational opportunities for action.

⁷ To know more about Circular 4.0: https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/circular4_0/en/home



Anna Giorgi says that the EUSALP group she coordinates⁸, which includes 22 members from 6 member states, exactly aims to promote the creation of an ecosystem of research and innovation in the Alpine region. This can happen if all the involved actors (research, business, policy level, civil society) establish an ongoing dialogue. The Alpine region is distinguished between two realities with different speeds: the cities in the plains that produce value quickly but also have a great impact on the Alpine environment and the vertical territories (mountains) that pay a difference in competitiveness. To pursue the driver of green growth it is necessary to agree the two speeds and shorten the gaps by creating new business models and new jobs through digitalization and working on the opportunities of the Alpine area: bioeconomy and renewable energy over the others.

Micheal Keller underlines all the three speeches demonstrate the companies are willing to go green but at the same time they fear they could lose competitiveness at least in the short term, so he asks what can be done to foster companies to go toward green transition.

Bernhard Kölmel answers that there should be a joint European legislation and to support small companies it is important to create and disseminate best practices in terms of methodologies and actions done at operational level. Birgit Weihs-Dopfer agrees that a standard regulation at European level is needed and that it should be offered to SMEs a concrete support to guide them through the transition with process in steps so that companies can clearly see what they have to do and the resources needed to handle the whole process. Another issue she raises is that the communication effort should be strengthened so sustainability could be seen as a competitive advantage. Anna Giorgi underlines that instead of the technological innovation which is quickly progressing, the political and social framework is lacking behind, so that tools and methodologies exist but are not made available and known for businesses. Moreover, without a deep cultural change the green transition could not really speed up.

⁸ To know more about AG1: <https://www.alpine-region.eu/action-group-1-Research-and-Innovation>



Panel Discussion No.2

»Cooperation actions at policy level«

Keynote: Jennifer Cassingena HARPER [MT] « Towards economic recovery: multilevel strategies for business resilience »

The European Green Deal (EDG) introduces a new directionality in terms of enhanced opportunities for transborder cooperation and moreover it calls for multilevel policy design and this is what a macroregional approach could offer. The EDG has a deep and large scope in terms of the changes which requires. Among all the others it has to be underlined the Industry mobilisation for clean sustainable economy and the EDG Impacts for business in terms of trade, imports, standards, supply chain is also strictly linked to other challenges currently faced by the European Union like the strategic and economical independence. The good side of this is that Macroregions are well-positioned to face these challenges because they can align different visions, goals and priorities, project a shared identity and culture and protecting common guiding principles and values, building sufficient critical mass and resilience to disruptions, make major transitions and address grand societal challenges, unlock resources and energies at all levels, empowering a wide range of players each with a valid role/perspective. Macroregions already proofed they are able to tackle EDG goals supporting economic recovery and business resilience through a strong impetus to drive major transitions which need to happen and require coordination, a long term cooperation framework (a level of stability), integrating sufficient efforts and resources round specific (transborder) issues, being a space for multilevel, multistakeholder, multidimensional partnerships, mobilising a range of players rallying different efforts, launching pilot transborder cooperation on issues at core of Green Deal, pioneering the use of green and innovative public procurement, changes in legislation and standards, more sustainable practices.

The EDG could also be in contrast with other strategies as for instance the smart specialisation approach. For instance, the EDG go to regional level with a top-down approach while S3 is often build with a place-based approach (entrepreneurial discovery). Anyway, there are also complementarities. Both are trying to introduce transition and transformation, there is a strong focus on business resilience, bringing all the actors involved is a common priority and both have a systematic evidence-based approach.

It would be important to connect strategies at different level starting from recognizing the framework that we have which include from the local initiatives to the Regional/national individual smart specialisation strategies till the Macro-region collaborative initiatives already underway. The Macroregion Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas (SRIA) should define the role of R&I in the Alpine macroregion's economic recovery. It should set a "common research agenda" able to build an effective R&I ecosystem in the Alpine Macroregional area" which requires strong business participation in innovation activities, fluid and abundant knowledge flows across R&I actors and good framework conditions that allow business innovation to flourish. Some targeted macroregional R&I pathways and



initiatives have been already identified in the SRIA Blueprint developed by the project A-RING⁹ and highlighted as tried and tested routes that could be combined to design a customized approach. From clusters interregional collaboration to thematic S3 interregional platforms, including also market inter-regional collaboration (e.g., The Vanguard Initiative), innovation investments (I3) – cross-regional funding of innovation, alignment of regional RDI funding programmes, till multi-level governance structures for implementing cross-regional funding options.

Panel discussion

Panelists:

Judit SCHRICK-SZENCZI - Ministry for Economic Affairs, Labour and Tourism Baden-Württemberg, Rita STEFFANUTTO - Director of the Research, Innovation and Energy Directorate at the Veneto Region, Filippo DADONE - Deputy Director of the Environment and Climate Directorate General at the Lombardy Region

Judit Schrick-Szenczi is being asked to share the experience of Innovation Express 2.0. Judit explains that to face the economic impact of the Covid, the European Commission initialized a meeting where all the Macro-regional strategies were involved with the goal to discuss possible initiatives to reinforce cluster and business network collaboration across borders and sectoral boundaries as a response to the crisis. The representatives of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) proposed to launch a cross-regional collaboration schemes taking as a model the BSR STARS INNOVATION EXPRESS. The programme was part of EUSBSR and implemented from 2012 until 2018. The smartness of the approach was that not a programme was created rather than existing national and/or regional programmes were just synchronised. The participating regions used their own programmes, administrative procedures remained unchanged. Applications applied according rules given in the regional programmes, no funding crossed borders. The need to speed up the process to face the emergency conducted to the launch of a pilot call. A quick assessment of the regions willing to participate and able to do (with open and available programs) was done. The ARDIA-Net¹⁰ project offered to support the preparation phase and act as call secretariat. They agreed on the priorities and jointly formulated the call text. A matchmaking platform was used to inform potential beneficiaries and facilitate the partnership building. The whole process was really fast. Four regions participated and in one year all the steps since the preparation of the call, the launch and the project selection were accomplished. In addition, the advantage is that, compared to classical transnational programs a big partnership is not needed and individual partner can have more money dedicated to develop activities. Although the process was smooth some elements are needed to successfully manage the call design and further implementation: having policy officers open minded and proactive in finding solutions, being supported by decision makers committed to boost transnational cooperation, synchronise the timing so that beneficiaries have

⁹ To know more about the A-RING project: <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/a-ring/en/home>

¹⁰ To know more about ARDIA-Net: <https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/ardia-net/en/home>



enough time to prepare the projects and the evaluation process can go in parallel in all the funding regions.

Rita Steffanutto is being asked what is needed in the perspective of the Veneto Region, to better support cross-regional cooperation to foster Green Transition. The Veneto Region believes in cooperation between actors both internally and at a transactional level. Internally, the Region has encouraged the emergence of regional innovative networks, clusters in the European sense that bring together the actors of our innovation ecosystem. Now is the time for networks to grow in transactional cooperation as well. The region will support these subjects so that they can be connected with other partners abroad in order that their mutual skills and opportunities to create innovation can be maximized and valued. The Smart Specialization Strategy will help this process so that priorities and common elements can be identified and taken as basis to build consistent collaboration. As the beginning of interregional cooperation, we can mention the project presented in our national Recovery and Resilience Plan "ecosystem of innovation" which involves in addition to Veneto also the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano. 9 Universities from the three areas are involved. The revision of the Intelligent Specialization Strategy also led to the decision to strengthen the regional participation in European cooperation networks such as the Vanguard Initiative and in one or more European partnerships such as High Technology Farming, Bioeconomy and Artificial Intelligence. Speaking of more critical challenges, cooperation is highly needed especially in order to find common solutions that can tackle situations that change rapidly with tools that can adapt quickly (e.g., the problem of energy independence).

Filippo Dadone is being asked what is the perspective of the Lombardy Region what is needed to better support cross-regional cooperation to foster Green Transition. The current energy and raw materials crisis are pushing the various national and regional authorities to simplify the administrative procedures to accelerate the green transition and at the same time funding opportunities are accumulating at all levels. The time can be considered ripe to launch more targeted and more advanced support initiatives. In the past, Lombardy Region tested some calls for proposals requiring more radical product and process innovations (not just waste recycling and energy saving) with a focus on optimizing the use of resources and energy. At this point it seems that the times are more mature for this type of calls. The priorities that the Lombardy Region has assigned to the EUSALP Action Groups go in the same direction: to go beyond the study phase and small pilot projects and to structure more complex and significant initiatives, always with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises' needs. The Lombardy Region has also tried to work on the issue of embedding to promote the inclusion of these priorities in operational programs. The most significant criticalities and barriers are the lack of homogeneity in the regulations of the different countries which can be obstacles to companies willing to building extended value chains; the regions moreover have their own specializations but this barrier can become an opportunity. The role of clusters, as for the Veneto Region, has proved to be fundamental in making the smart specialization strategy concrete because clusters very effectively spread good practices among companies and because they transfer the business needs and difficulties to regional decision-makers. Clusters were also effective in defining the protocol for sustainable development because they transferred the feedback from companies. For the future, the main challenges will be the simplification and harmonisation of procedures and languages as well the development of digital innovation hubs



distributed over the territories because the support needed by rural and mountain areas and in metropolitan ones are quite different.

Michael Keller notices that all the three speakers underlined the importance of simple tools and simplification of administrative procedures. Rita Steffanutto also agrees that simplification is important and that it can be achieved if also the policy officers' technical competences and skills are upgraded and specialised to be able to manage joint transnational initiatives. The political level should also be much involved; policy permanent tables should be organised to share needs and agree shared and synergic strategies. Filippo Dadone adds that the Lombardy Region worked a lot to link the regional programs to the macroregional priorities and that coordinated funded actions are really a priority in the term of join calls if possible or at least, coordinated calls. The topic of Hydrogen was priority which is now tackled together by different regions together as well as the initiative of the financial dialogues in EUSALP. Finally, Filippo Dadone underlines that to foster a sustainable development, beyond harmonising regulation, it is very important to work on the cultural aspect and the consumers' attitude.



Conclusion

It was the aim of this fourth policy table of the BE-READI ALPS project to discuss the status quo, remaining challenges and barriers, and ideas for future improvements in the quest of engaging the Alpine region's SME ecosystem into green transition. The discussion focused on two broad issues, a general overview on how to facilitate the green transition for businesses in the Alpine region, and a discussion specifically addressing the question of how to improve cross-border cooperation among relevant innovation actors. The participants on the panels represented the business perspective, research, clusters, but also policy levels. Among the most urgent issues to better support businesses on green transition, the experts emphasized the role of a more harmonized legislative approach (inducing internalization of external costs) and the need for best practices as a means to effectively communicate about opportunities and solutions. From a practical perspective, companies are often also needing simple support to take relevant first steps towards greener approaches, which entities such as cluster initiatives can provide. As another challenge, the panellists have identified the difficulty to deploy scientific knowledge among SMEs. The discussion has also touched upon the issue of greenwashing, with some panellists seeing greenwashing critically, while others emphasizing the fact that greenwashing can be an entry point towards real action.

With respect to improved cross-regional cooperation, good practice has been shared from recent experience with the Innovation Express 2021, which was a successful attempt at establishing cross-regional synchronized calls for RDI projects. It was highlighted that improved cooperation is not only necessary within, but also between macro-regions and that there remains an unexploited potential to learn from each other. In addition, managing authorities of mainstream programs should be involved much more in cross-regional RDI cooperation. The policy table also provided very concrete ideas to further push cross-regional action on green transition for SME, including a permanent table with political EUSALP representatives on green transition and trainings on cooperation mechanisms and capacity building.

