



Workplan 2023-2025

Action group 7 – Green infrastructure

Interreg
Alpine Space



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Green infrastructure¹ has been defined as “A *strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, while also enhancing biodiversity.*” AG7 acts as a facilitator with the objective to empower stakeholders with knowledge and tools to set and implement policies for the benefit of both nature and ‘alpine’ people.

¹ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure_en

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

AG7 focuses on developing ecological connectivity within a multifunctional GI² network and thus on strengthening, improving and restoring biodiversity, as well as ecosystem services. With its broad representation of members from Alpine countries and regions as well as of advisors with different institutional and sectoral backgrounds, AG7 builds on a dialogue including stakeholders from all relevant sectors. It aims at setting up a comprehensive macro-regional scheme by applying the EU Strategy for Green Infrastructure to regional scales and making the Alps an outstanding candidate for GI in Europe. The AG7 provides the framework for developing a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas, including features in rural and urban areas, which together – and functionally interconnected – ensure diverse advantages for nature, as well as social benefits, cultural and economic prosperity for humans.

The main fields of interest of the different members are reflecting the specific objectives of the AG7.

- To identify Alpine GI elements of transnational relevance, improve planning instruments, governance approaches and explore funding opportunities.
- To promote the various benefits of GI as complementary solutions to Grey Infrastructure and bring GI onto the political agenda of the Alpine Region.
- To allow the benefits of ecological connectivity to emerge at ecosystem and societal dimensions, enhancing resilience to threats such as climate change.
- To contribute to better transboundary governance on the field of nature and GI.
- To facilitate ideas and bridge the gap between nature and economy by promoting green infrastructure as a tool towards green and circular economy

To halt biodiversity loss, develop and propose solutions and address challenges such as missing connections between natural areas and homogeneous and impoverished lowlands.

² Green infrastructure (GI) is a network of natural and semi-natural areas designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services. This network of green (land) and blue (water) spaces can improve environmental conditions and therefore citizens' health and quality of life.

2. Composition and sub-groups

AG7 is composed by public members with decision making capacity representing Alpine states and regions. In the past the public members with decision-making capacity unanimously decided to involve (non- public) key stakeholders in the implementation process (IUCN, Alpine Network of Protected Areas-ALPARC, CAA-Club Arc Alpin, Alpine Metropolises Network, ISCAR, CIPRA, WWF). This was based on their expressed interest for joining the Action Group and their potential to its contribution. Connection to the European level is ensured by participation of DG Environment.

However, there is a need to clarify and consolidate the membership of the AG7 in terms of active participation to the meetings and clear appointment of representatives. AG7 will closely cooperate with TSS (EUSALP Technical Support Structure) to support this process.

Within the AG some members were nominated as caretakers for specific topics or so called 'star initiatives. This allows better coordination and focus of some of the members according to their preferences and competences.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

The topic of AG7 is addressing a wide variety of different fields. Most stakeholders are representatives of different governance level. The objective of the current workplan is to better reach 'middle management' at ministries and administrations that is usually responsible for the preparation and implementation of the policies.

A special attention will be given to:

cross-MRS cooperation on Ecological Connectivity (EUSDR (PA6), possibly EUSAIR)

Basic element to improve cross MRS cooperation in the field of ecological connectivity strategies is to promote the exchange of best practices and experiences between the different strategies and relevant Action Group / Priority Area. To this end, regular meetings, workshops, and conferences could be organized to bring together representatives of the different strategies to discuss their approaches and results and to learn from each other.

Another approach would be to establish common platforms that could facilitate the exchange of information and foster collaboration among the MRS working on joint topics. Such platforms could also help identify synergies between the different strategies and develop joint projects and actions. Areas of ecological connectivity between MRSs may become focal areas for concrete actions on the ground and for applying trans-MRS governance.

Milestone: at least one event or action per year with another MRS or in a corridor between two MRSs.

Alpine biodiversity board (ABB)

The composition of ABB and AG7 allows a good flow and exchange of the information regarding common issues. It is foreseen to connect activities and to use the synergies as both

groups share similar objectives and stakeholders. One of its objectives is to enhance transboundary cooperation and ecological connectivity.

Milestone: at least one AG/-ABB joint event/action per year

AG6 and AC MAMF (Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry Working Group)

A lively and governed landscape is pivotal for ensuring the development of an Alpine GI network. It should rely on the active involvement of the citizens living in the interested territories, with a particular focus on the most relevant ecological corridors. Usually, they are located in valleys and plateau where concurrent uses are in operation. The actual dynamics both at demographical and economic level call for a specific attention the topic of mountain agriculture on the one side. On the other side the loss of biodiversity and loss of ecological connectivity in the lowlands shows the importance of the involvement of the valley farming to find solution and strengthen the dialogue between mountain and valley actors. AG7 will provide AG6 and AC MAMF.

Milestone: the position of GI disseminated to AG6 and AC MAMF

4. The role of the Youth Council

One representative of the youth council will be following the work of the AG7. The plan is to 'use this asset' to secure a good flow of information that will help AG7 to better address the youth as one of the target groups. On the other hand, it is about addressing future challenges through the eyes of the future generations.

AG7 will therefore:

- Establish cooperation between **GI goes business award** and the **Pitch your project** initiative. They both follow innovative, nature friendly business solutions and could benefit one from another in terms of promotion, better visibility and inclusion of green infrastructure in more interesting ideas.
- Include youth representation and perspective in other foreseen activities and project proposals.

Milestone: common dissemination activity among GI goes business award and Pitch your project

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

According to its mission statement, AG7 promotes Green Infrastructure (GI) as a basis for life of present and future generations in the Alpine Region. AG7 tackles current and upcoming ecological, economic, and social challenges and implements practice-oriented projects to offer demand-oriented products and services in the field of knowledge transfer, networking and informed decision-making.

In doing so, AG7 strongly followed a policy cycle approach: starting with political decision making by the adoption of the political declaration “[Alpine Green Infrastructure – Joining Forces for nature, people and the economy](#)”, strategic initiatives have been developed - the so-called “star initiatives”. Several projects under different (EU) funding programs were set up to implement these star initiatives, like the Alpine Space Program project “[LUIGI – Linking urban and \(inner\)alpine Green Infrastructure](#)” and “ECO-ALPSWATER - [Innovative Ecological Assessment and Water Management Strategy for the Protection of Ecosystem Services in Alpine Lakes and Rivers](#)”, INTERREG A project “[INNsieme](#)”, and the ones co-funded by ARPAF as ALPJOBs (ended February 2020), REDIAFOR and IMPULS4ACTION (first steps towards an Alpine wide peatland process), which strongly demonstrated the cooperation with other AGs in particular the cross AGs collaboration has been reinforced with an active participation into the EUSALP Task Force “Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber”.

AG7 participated at the development of the Joint paper on Spatial Planning with a specific contribution on Alpine GI network.

With the EUSALP Innovation Facility a feasibility study outlines the potentials of the [EUSALP Innovation Award](#) as tool for supporting innovative solutions.

So, the successful set-up of the “[GI goes business](#)” award is worth to be highlighted as one of the key activities of AG7. In 2021 the EUSALP AG7 launched the first edition of the competition to support innovative ideas, products, and services for a Green Economy in the Alpine Macro region. Based on the success of this first round a second edition was launched at the occasion of the Annual Forum 2022 under Italian EUSALP Presidency. The awarding ceremony of the 2nd edition took place with the Bavarian State Minister of the Environment on 4 May 2023 in Munich.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

GI and ecological connectivity affect entire landscapes that are composed of different ecosystems (wetlands, forests, farmland, urban areas etc) and relate to different sectors (agriculture, forestry, energy, water etc). As such AG7 in future aims to take a stronger landscape perspective, where individual ecosystems or economic sectors constitute individual elements of a landscape that need to be considered separately, but also as part of a multifunctional landscape. This perspective also helps to define interlinkages between the

elements and to identify synergies, trade-offs or conflicts that arise in a landscape setting. Ecosystems or sectors to be further explored in the context of GI and connectivity are: peatlands, rivers, multifunctional forest, (mountain) agriculture and green business.

1. CONNECTED ECOSYSTEMS AND LANDSCAPES

1.1. PEATLANDS

Peatlands are an essential part of an intact Green Infrastructure network. They provide the habitat for distinctive flora and fauna and are therefore a significant factor with regard to biodiversity. As peatlands store large amounts of sequestered carbon, the protection and preservation of peatlands is an important component of mitigating climate crisis.

Based on the stakeholder workshops held, the resulting road map for peatlands, the impact model and the activities on the issue of peatlands will be continued. The focus here lies on involving stakeholders in direct implementation for peatland protection and restoration and sustainable use of organic soils. For this purpose, a proposal for an ASP classic project with an Alpine wide scope and impact should be prepared.

Main output: project proposal submitted to ASP

Policy impact: public administrations supported in passing policies favourable to peatlands

Financial resources : internal + ASP

1.2. RIVERS

Rivers and river corridors are an essential part of the GI in the Alps. Settlement development, (renewable) energy production, intensified land use, over tourism and many more are current threats to rivers and ecosystems. In addition, climate change with severe droughts on the one side and floods or landslides on the other side in the last years only build pressure to water resources of the Alps. AG7 wants to point out the need to understand water bodies as a transboundary network of interconnected (eco)systems and to strengthen the existing law e.g., the Water Framework Directive (WFD). AG7 welcomes the establishment of the Water transition task force and will actively participate in it. As well it will be pursued the idea, coming from different AG members and regions, to design project proposals and apply for financing at ASP, INTERREG or other European programmes.

Main output: project proposal submitted to ASP

Policy impact: contribution to the implementation of WFD

Financial resources: internal + ASP

1.3. MULTIFUNCTIONAL FORESTS

Multifunctional forests are increasingly seen as a more sustainable and resilient approach to forest management, as they promote ecological integrity and provide a range of benefits beyond just timber production. However, implementing multifunctional forest management can be challenging, as it requires coordination among multiple stakeholders and careful consideration of competing values and interests. AG7 will continue to contribute to the Task

Force and would like to work on Ecosystem services (ES) provided by peri-urban forest sites with High Biodiversity Value in times of climate crisis. Another activity is the analysis of the changes in forest land cover in the Alps (2000-2018) to be financed with internal funds or with external resources whenever a specific working group will be established.

Main output: dissemination of findings to forest administrations

Policy impact: public dialogue

Financial resources: internal

2. HORIZONTAL ACTIVITIES

2.1. GI GOES BUSINESS AWARD

The Green Infrastructure goes business award supports innovative ideas, products and services for a Green Economy and promotes sustainable development in the EUSALP. It is one of the key achievements of AG7 and there have been two consecutive editions (2022, 2023). The pilot edition ran from autumn 2021 to spring 2022. The second edition was financed by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and the Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection. Funding is the recurring challenge of the initiative. As a next step the third edition is foreseen following the pattern of the first two. The third edition will be used to gain concrete outputs towards the next steps of evolution to secure financing, improve visibility and profile and finally scale it up to a real green business incubator.

Main output: 3rd + n edition of the GI goes business award

Policy impact: high level event with political representation to promote winners

Financial resources: regional/national contributions

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

The Nature Restoration Law is a key element of the EU Biodiversity strategy which calls for binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters. The Alps are a crucial region for biodiversity in Europe, as they are home to many unique and endangered species and their habitats, as well as provide other benefits such as improved air and water quality, carbon sequestration, and opportunities for recreation and tourism. EU countries are expected to submit National Restoration Plans to the Commission within two years of the Regulation coming into force, showing how they will deliver on the targets.

AG7 recognises the need to highlight the importance of nature, green infrastructure and its transboundary character. It aims to liaise with experts and public and regional administrations that will be engaged in the preparation of ecosystem restoration plans to also stress the role of GI and connectivity in an Alpine-wide, cross-country and multilevel perspective. AG7 will closely work together with other initiatives (e.g. Alpine Biodiversity Board) that support the development and implementation of restoration

plans and foster the establishment of exchange and cooperation networks to raise awareness for coherent approaches.

The concept of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) will be used in the process as a tool to better understand what Green Infrastructure is and how it can be used to maintain or increase the quality of life. They also show a possibility to connect nature and (green, circular, bio-) economy in a sustainable way. A set of NBS will be selected and used to support activities in awareness rising of the general public and capacity building of the experts.

Nature-based solutions (NBS) refer to actions that make use of nature and its biodiversity to address social and environmental challenges. These solutions leverage the power of ecosystems to provide a range of benefits to people and the planet, such as climate mitigation, disaster risk reduction, water security, and biodiversity conservation.

Examples of nature-based solutions include reforestation, restoration of wetlands and grasslands, sustainable agriculture and forestry practices, green infrastructure, and protected areas. These solutions work by enhancing ecosystem functions, such as carbon sequestration, water regulation, and soil fertility, which in turn support human well-being and ecological resilience.

Nature-based solutions are increasingly recognized as an important approach to addressing global challenges, particularly in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss. They offer a sustainable, cost-effective, and scalable way to promote human well-being while protecting the natural systems on which we depend.

Policy impact:

- approval and implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Law made smoother
- crossborder connectivity becoming part of the political agenda

Financial resources : internal, DG ENV

3. Cross-cutting priorities

Facilitating circular economy in short supply chains

AG7 will try to link the GI goes business award with the work of the Circular economy group (AG2). Green infrastructure with the tools such as Nature based solution show great potential to expand the idea of circular economy, make it greener and more mainstream.

Promoting a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water

Water is a meeting point of many ecosystems. By participating in the Task force AG7 wants to highlight the transboundary interconnection of GI. The idea is also to link management of rivers, river corridors and other aquatic habitats as peatlands with Nature restoration law and/or Water Framework Directive and highlight the need to better address different water uses and conflict prevention/solving.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

Crucial for success is a strict focus on the needs of the target groups (client orientation), high speed and effective communication, especially with actors on the ground (municipalities, Local Action Groups) and sectoral administrations of the regions (middle management). Better communication is more important than even more content. Therefore all activities have a clear and dedicated communication pillar – with dialogue in both directions. AG7 will link its communication activities with other groups and networks that work on similar issues (E.g. other AGs, Alpine Biodiversity Board, ...). AG also recognises the need to better link its work and disseminate relevant information to the EB.

Communication channels :

- EUSALP and partner websites
- GI wiki (green infrastructure definition and discussion system for general public)
- GI PR campaign (easy going small messages via social media based on wiki)
- AG7 as a knowledge hub (facilitation point of/for projects; network of projects → AG7 → EB)
- High level political representatives as promoters

2. Events

AG7 will organise events that will address especially experts and implementers of policies in regions/states for the topics listed in Priorities section. It will try to find synergies with other partners within EUSALP and other networks to ensure better outreach.

Yearly editions of the GI goes business awarding ceremony are foreseen that will include high level political representation.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	
please describe if possible	
n. cross-border/transnational events	3
please describe if possible	
n. joint policy recommendation	1
GI and RES	

n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group)	2
Peatlands, rivers	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group)	1
n. of papers / research works to be published	1
please describe if possible	
budget to be raised with European funding	
please describe if possible	
other: joint initiatives with other MRS	2
please describe if possible	