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## *AlpPlan/PlanToConnect* Expert Platform

on Green Infrastructure, Ecological Connectivity and Spatial Planning

PlanToConnect Activity 3.3:

Deliverable D.3.3.1 “Transnational expert working group: mission and objectives”

*Adopted at the meeting/workshop of the Expert Platform in Ljubljana on 27 November 2023*

### Mission statement

The *AlpPlan/PlanToConnect* Expert Platform promotes **networking with the scientific community, experts, implementers of GI-projects and policy-makers** to address **knowledge gaps and challenges** in the design and implementation of a **strategic, well-connected, multi-functional and cross-border network of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI)** as basis to enhance nature and human well-being across the Alpine Space. It focusses on **priority actions for (re-)connecting fragmented landscapes** and to assure that conservation and restoration of **ecological connectivity between protected areas** become an **integral part of Spatial Planning and Territorial Development systems** in the Alpine Space.

### Background

In line with recent developments in the (European) policy framework (e.g. EU Nature Restoration law, Biodiversity Strategy, Green Deal, COP15 '30 by 30' goal), the **project is developing an “Alpine Planning Strategy for Ecological Connectivity”** that promotes **multifunctional Green and Blue Infrastructure networks (GBI) and Nature-based Solutions (NBS)** as a reference for the conservation and restoration of ecological connectivity in the Alps. Although the project focus is on ecological connectivity, analysing the **multifunctional dimensions of GBI** also involves **other important land-based ecosystem services** that can be addressed in the Expert Platform activities. These include, in particular, soil and climate protection as well as adaptation to climate change and the associated increased risks from (alpine) natural hazards. However, overcoming the challenges of global change also means that, for example, the transformation of the energy sector and the **expansion of renewable energy infrastructure** in open spaces must be **coordinated with the requirements of GBI networks**. One of the main challenges associated with this, is the need to harmonize sectoral policies and sectoral planning approaches in order to develop joint perspectives for overall sustainable territorial development.

At **alpine level**, the planning strategy defines and identifies **“transnational priority connectivity areas for spatial planning”** as areas where specific provisions aimed at preserving or re-establishing ecological



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connectivity should be included in national and regional spatial plans to avoid the isolation of Alpine biodiversity and enable ecosystem adaptation to climate change. At the **local level**, within these areas, **specific natural and semi-natural landscape elements** will need to be conserved and, if necessary, new artificial ones created as part of a multi-purpose, multifunctional network of GBI to conserve and improve ecological connectivity between "core alpine conservation areas".

In the **planning of such networks**, the design and implementation of "**connectivity conservation and restoration areas**" **outside the protected areas** is particularly challenging and typically includes: the protection of "gateways" still free of infrastructural development, defragmentation actions to overcome existing infrastructural barriers, interventions to improve the quality of habitats and actions to counter the spread of invasive species.

To **ensure their long-term implementation**, "conservation and connectivity restoration areas" should then become an **integral part of the spatial plans** of the concerned territories as "a clearly defined geographical space, outside protected areas, that is governed and managed in the long term to maintain or restore effective ecological connectivity". Appropriate **Impact Assessment procedures** should be applied to all works and plans that may affect the functionality of these areas. The design of "**connectivity conservation and restoration areas**" in "transnational priority connectivity areas for spatial planning", their integration in spatial plans of concerned authorities and the definition of appropriate **cross-border governance arrangements** for their implementation is therefore also a topic of the Strategy.

## Scope & Objectives

The *AlpPlan/PlanToConnect* Expert Platform on Green Infrastructure, Ecological Connectivity and Spatial Planning is the **central interface for including external expertise** in the *PlanToConnect* project on a transnational level. At the same time, it also serves to **disseminate the results and recommendations** arising from the project work. The close cooperation between the ARL European Working Group *AlpPlan* and the *PlanToConnect* project supports long-term cooperation objectives on spatial planning and sustainable development in the Alpine region. The Expert Platform aims at a **long-term transnational cooperation to implement the results of the *PlanToConnect* project** (mainly the Alpine Planning Strategy) **beyond the initial project lifetime** and to ensure a long-term integration of Ecological Connectivity and Green Infrastructure concerns in Alpine spatial planning.

It is intended to organize an **open but regular and structured exchange** on key topics of the *PlanToConnect* project, which are presented and discussed according to the specific thematic focus. These topics and contents are framed within the **nexus of green infrastructure, ecological connectivity and spatial planning**, both from a scientific and application-oriented perspective.

In addition to the project partners and their observer organisations, the Expert Platform is **open to all interested experts with a thematic connection**. In accordance with the working principles of the *AlpPlan* network, the **cooperation of scientific scholars** (e.g. from universities or research institutes) **and**



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**practitioners** (e.g. from ministries, administrations or private planning offices) is envisaged. In addition to individual experts, the Expert Platform also intends to address **representatives of relevant networks, institutions and organisations** in particular, including:

- **Alpine Convention Thematic Working Bodies**, e.g.: Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development Working Group; Large Carnivores, Wild Ungulates and Society Working Group (WISO), Alpine Biodiversity Board; Alpine Climate Board; Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry Working Group
- **EUSALP Action Groups**, e.g.: AG7 (“To develop ecological connectivity in the whole EUSALP territory”), AG6 (“To preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources”), AG8 (“Action Group 8: To improve risk management and to better manage climate change, including major natural risks prevention”), AG 9 (“To make the territory a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy”)
- **Transnational research/cooperation projects**, from programmes such as Horizon Europe (e.g. NaturaConnect), ESPON or Interreg Central Europe
- **National/regional institutions** in charge of topics related to the thematic scope
- **NGOs**, such as e.g. CIPRA or WWF

The Expert Platform should not only enable an open exchange on project contents, but also have a **concrete influence on central project results/outputs** and therefore assure adequate (scientific) quality. It plays an **active and important role in the elaboration, dissemination and implementation of the Alpine Planning Strategy** (“Alpine Planning Strategy for ecological connectivity, harmonized and integrated planning of GBI networks in priority areas” - PlanToConnect Output 1.1). Furthermore, other (selected) preliminary results will be presented in order to obtain feedback from the experts. In addition, **own products** are also possible, depending on the contributions of the experts involved. This includes in particular the elaboration of an **ARL AlpPlan position paper**.

The meetings will be carried out **mainly through workshops**, which will take place predominantly online (to enable experts from the entire Alpine Space to participate in an easy way). These can either be held **publicly or addressed to a specific external (working) group** with which an exchange is foreseen. During the project period 2023-2025, a face-to-face event is planned at least once a year, which can be combined with the General Assembly of the *AlpPlan* network (see Timeline/Milestones below). It is not necessary for every expert to participate in all meetings. Rather, the aim is to ensure an adequate group of participants for each of the changing thematic priorities.

This affects **communication** in the sense that information is **shared both publicly and directly with the experts** who regularly participate. In addition to announcing workshops and similar formats via the **public communication channels** of *AlpPlan* (ARL International) and *PlanToConnect*, a **mailing list** is set up by *AlpPlan* for this purpose, to which interested persons can subscribe and receive regular updates. Particularly committed experts can also take up a general *AlpPlan* membership, in order to be tied to the network and the cooperation initiative on a long-term basis.



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## Timeline/ Milestones *(to be further concretized in the course of the project)*

1<sup>st</sup> meeting (online kick-off, 2 October 2023): Introducing the PlanToConnect project, presenting/discussing basic concepts and mapping activities: Small group (PlanToConnect partnership + observers/close experts)

2<sup>nd</sup> meeting (27.-28. November 2023 at UIRS in Ljubljana, SI): Transnational on-site (hybrid) workshop in combination with *AlpPlan* general assembly; adoption of the “mission & objectives” deliverable

Online workshop(s) with varying focus topics

Meeting (25-28 November 2024 at University Centre Innsbruck in *Obergurgl*, AT): 2-days on-site mid-term transnational workshop as input for the Alpine Planning Strategy