



Project Acronym: Cradle-Alp

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D.3.2.2

Local Policy dialogues to contribute to S4 finalisation

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Cradle-ALP – Local Policy dialogues to contribute to S4finalisation

Executive Summary

This deliverable documents the implementation of local policy dialogues performed by the project partners either on regional and/or national level. This deliverable is strongly linked to D.3.3.2 “Establishing cooperation and mutual planning of funds to support investments by SMEs on C2C”. Regions of AT, CH, DE built upon experiences made with synchronized funding schemes in the previous Interreg Alpine Space projects ARDIA-Net and INNOBIOVC. Cradle-ALP regions of IT, FR and SLO need to start dialogues with funding authorities on possibilities of synchronized funding schemes.

All project partners have contributed to the organization of the 7 local policy dialogue meetings to **exchange with policy level (regional or national level and on EUSALP level) in order to**

- present Cradle-ALP results/learnings for up-take by strategy/policy level
- explore and discuss to what extent the support of cradle to cradle, circular design and circular substitutions for linear products in industrial manufacturing processes in the Alpine Space is considered in S3 strategies/ROP 2021-2027 and national/regional funding programmes
- highlight the need of transregional cooperation for bridging knowledge/research gaps to boost cradle to cradle, circular design and circular substitutions for linear products in industrial manufacturing processes
- inform and explore possibilities for Innovation Express Scheme - a smart way to enable and fund transregional cooperation

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1 Introduction to the Cradle-Alp project

Cradle-ALP aims for mainstreaming cradle to cradle (C2C) approaches, circular design and circular substitutions (from the alpine region) for linear products in industrial processes, in different industrial sectors. The Alpine Space has many natural resources and the technologies to substitute fossil raw materials and toxic substances from production with circular and environmentally friendly alternatives. This should lead to the fact that materials and products can be led back into a healthy cycle after use. The focus of this project shall be on the substitution of chemical and fossil based/unsustainable materials with more circular, sustainable and bio-degradable ones.

First, the partners build a broad awareness and understanding in the public, the relevant industries as well as among stakeholders from policy and innovation intermediaries, for the opportunities, barriers and mechanisms of the transformation of industrial products towards higher circularity by means of C2C approaches, circular design and circular substitutions. Business support providers shall be trained to accompany the transformation of businesses along more circular value chains.

In a second step, the partners explore in details and test opportunities for implementing C2C approaches, circular design and circular substitutions along specific value chains in the Chemistry & Material, Composites, Packaging, Textiles, Wood & Furniture sectors supported by digital technologies. Building on a thorough multidimensional (technology, policy, economy, etc.) roadmapping exercise, transnational groupings of stakeholders – including businesses – will be installed, with the aim to transfer the C2C roadmaps into industrial practice along exemplary value chains.

Finally, the partners work towards ensuring a transnational policy convergence towards transnational strategies in the priority sectors of the project and initiating common cross border funding instruments for the industrial C2C transformation.

2 Objective and scope

Activity 3.2 “Contributing to enhance circularity and zero-waste policies in Alpine Space” aims to strongly connect C2C with the strategies and policies concerning economic development, environment, energy and sustainable production processes at different levels – from advisory board level to local policy level and to macro-regional EUSALP level.

A guideline for the local dialogue meetings and relevant topics for discussion as well as an agenda proposal were provided to the consortium.

Thus the 7 local policy dialogue meetings aimed at:

- Connecting with local strategy and policy level to present Cradle-ALP aim, results, roadmaps, pilots experiences and learnings with a focus on strategic uptake to support cradle to cradle, circular design and circular substitutions for linear products in industrial manufacturing processes in the Alpine Space.
- Highlighting the importance of transregional cooperation for exchange and to gain external know-how for bridging gaps and boosting implementation of regional goals.
- Presenting possibilities for funding transregional cooperation based on existing regional funding programmes e.g. Innovation Express Scheme.

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Goals of the policy dialogues:

- Gain interest for synchronized funding for transregional cooperation projects by means of existing regional/national funding programmes.
- Exchange and discuss on interest and possibilities for synchronizing funding schemes? (linked to A3.3, D.3.3.2 Establishing cooperation and mutual planning of funds to support investments by SMEs on C2C)
- Invitation to info/exchange meeting on Innovation Express with other Cradle-ALP partner regions. (A3.3)

3 7 Local policy dialogues

3.1 Austria #1

Date: 01.10.2025

Participating entities:

- Host: Business Upper Austria – Upper Austrian Business Agency & BOKU University
- Policy and Location Strategy Department at Business Upper Austria, responsible for the regional economy and research strategy
- FFG – Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft (Austrian Research Funding Organisation)



Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations):

- Emphasis on the importance of aligning national programs with EU strategies, such as Horizon Europe while also responding to legislative developments like the digital product passport.
- Funding priorities are shaped through input from thematic platforms involving both industry and research institutions. Interest groups and platforms (e.g. Clusters in general, National Cluster Platform Austria, I.4.0 Platform Austria) help identify key challenges and ensure that national programs reflect broader community needs rather than individual company interests.
- M-ERA.NET as a stable, annually recurring EU-wide funding network involving over 40 countries. Encouragement of participation and information sharing within this framework, especially for projects addressing environmental challenges and materials development.

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- Importance of informal coordination between regional and national levels, particularly with ministries and the FFG. While formal alignment is challenging, ongoing dialogue helps avoid redundancies and ensures regional programs complement national initiatives.
- Past experiences: regions followed EU funding trends (e.g., Life Sciences), sometimes without having local strengths in those areas. It was noted that current themes like circular economy and production technologies are better suited to Upper Austria's capabilities.
- Past attempts at joint funding calls even within Austria were extremely complex and ultimately not worth repeating due to administrative challenges and conflicting regional interests.
- While international partners are allowed in regional calls in Upper Austria, they often face funding limitations and must demonstrate clear added value, as regional funds typically do not support foreign entities directly.
- Recommendation of utilizing larger, established structures like M-ERA.NET to manage synchronized calls more effectively, citing FFG's experience coordinating 40 funding organizations as part of a major EU project.
- Availability of permanently open, thematically broad funding programs (e.g., FFG Basisprogramm) and stressing of importance of early communication through call calendars and matchmaking to support SMEs and transregional collaboration.

3.2 Austria #2

Date: 09.10. 09.2025

Participating entities:

- Host: Business Upper Austria – Upper Austrian Business Agency
- Government of Salzburg (Head of Department 1/01: Regional Development and EU Regional Policy of the State of Salzburg and Salzburg's representative of the EUSALP presidency)



Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations):

- Both participants expressed strong appreciation for the Cradle-ALP project, highlighting its innovative approach to circular economy topics and its practical relevance for small and medium-sized enterprises across regions.

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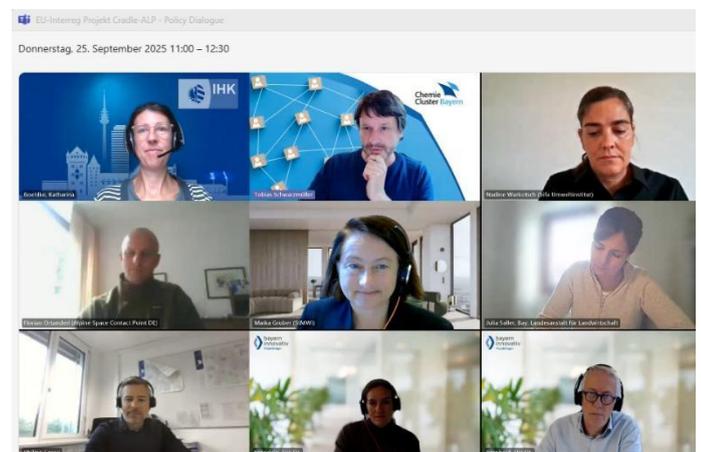
- Projects working on similar themes should be better connected to enable knowledge exchange, avoid duplication, and strengthen synergies across programmes and regions.
- It was noted that ensuring broad and regionally balanced participation in workshops and pilot activities remains a challenge but is important for drawing meaningful policy conclusions. Involving a significant-enough number of SMEs can be challenging.
- Salzburg's regional strategy framework was described as integrating sustainability, circular economy, and innovation as key priorities for development.
- Efforts are being made to align European and regional funding instruments more closely with sustainability goals, though administrative and budgetary limitations still pose challenges.
- Both participants considered synchronized funding initiatives valuable for experimentation and learning but felt that future cooperation should rely more on flexible, long-term, and bottom-up approaches rather than tightly coordinated calls.

3.3 Bavaria, DE

Date: 25.09.2025

Participating entities:

- Host: CCB – Chemistry Cluster Bavaria
- Alpine Space Contact Point
- Projektträger Bayern (PtB) (Project Management Agency Bavaria)
- Bayern Innovativ
- Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy
- Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection
- Chamber of Industry and Commerce Nuremberg
- bifa Umweltinstitut



Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations) in Bavaria:

- Synchronization of funding programs is generally considered difficult because it involves a great deal of effort and the various regions/states have very different administrative structures.
- Funding agencies such as the Project Management Agency Bavaria (PtB) cannot decide independently on synchronization, as it is only the contractor for the implementation of a funding program. The decision lies with the ministry.
- Synchronization of funding programs could be conceivable for technology-neutral programs and funding of individual projects.

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With regard to individual applications, it is usually possible to involve a cooperation partner via a subcontract, e.g., as a service provider or for contract research. This is considered easier and more direct than synchronizing funding programs.

Current funding program in Bavaria addressing Circular Economy: [Bavarian Transformation Fund: R&D funding \(BayTP+\), process and organizational innovation, investment funding for chemical or biochemical recycling plants for plastic waste.](#)

3.4 Baden-Württemberg, DE

Date: 29.08.2025

Participating entities:

- Host: TZ-Horb a.N.
- Wirtschaftsförderung Horb a.N.
- Wirtschaftsförderung NSW
- Landratsamt FDS
- VDI|VDE|IT Stuttgart
- RegioClusterAgentur für Innovation Transformation, Baden-Württemberg



Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations):

- Synchronized cross-regional funding schemes have already been tried in BW, but despite the commitment of state secretaries and senior staff, they have been unsuccessful.
- It was suggested that regional stakeholders and actors should be involved at an earlier stage in the design of funding frameworks in order to better meet the specific needs of individual regions.
- It was also observed that the topics of funding projects are increasingly tending toward cross-cutting issues such as digitalization & AI, transformation, and sustainability. These are issues that affect all regions but should be addressed differently. This also requires greater programmatic flexibility within the programs and also during the implementation phase.
- Create less duplication of structures for greater efficiency and promote stronger competition (of good ideas and successful projects) between regions.
- Projects should also grow in scope but decrease in quantity. This will allow the project partners and regions to focus better and longer on a project in order to achieve more large-scale (and thus more sustainable) outputs.

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3.5 Fribourg, CH

Date: Ongoing, since March 2025

Participating entities:

- HEIA-FR – School of Engineering and Architecture of Fribourg
- Fribourg Development Agency
- Federal Office for Spatial Development
- University of Applied Sciences of Western Switzerland
- University of Fribourg, Fribourg School of Management, School of Social Work, School of Nursing Sciences



Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations):

- Development of a brand-new Competence Center at HEIA-FR, supporting an R&D approach focused on the bio-based feedstock valorization pathways identified during the Cradle-ALP pilot phase.
- Synchronized call for R&D projects in the field of sustainable transformation and circular transition with three other Universities of Applied Sciences (School of management, School of social work and School of nursing sciences) – Submission Deadline: November 21, 2025.

3.6 Rhone-Alpes, FR

Date: 1 October 2025

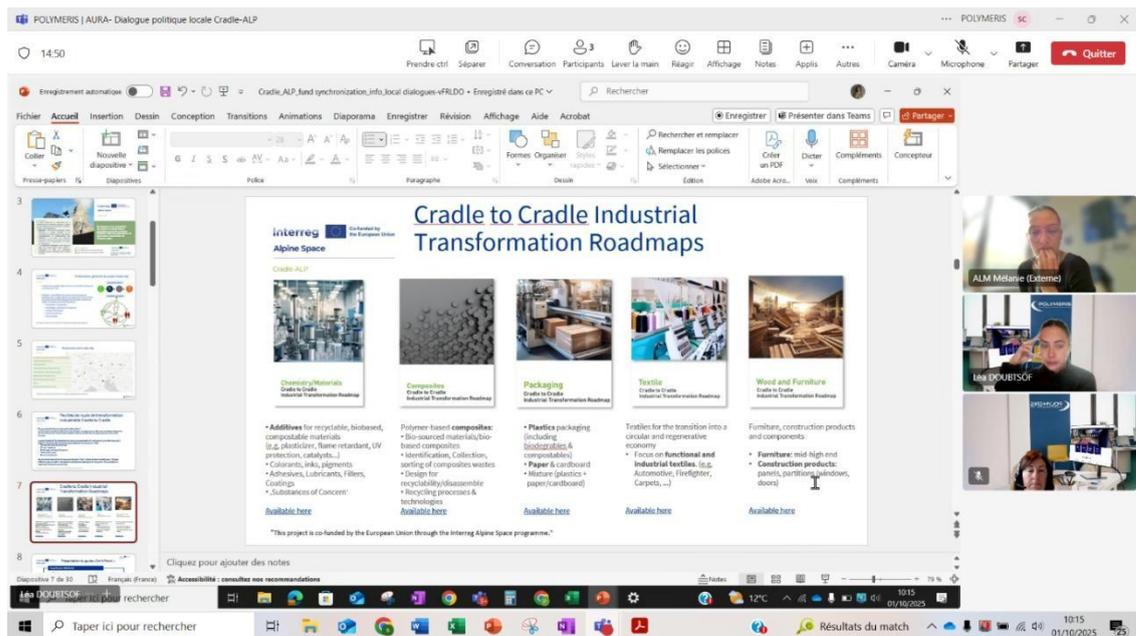
Participating entities:

- Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes
- POLYMERIS (host)

Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations):

- The regional authority expressed a strong interest in the topics related to circular economy and emphasized the importance of supporting initiatives that contribute to sustainable resource management and material recycling.
- They highlighted their willingness to stay informed about the project's progress and requested to receive a follow-up and access to the final reports once they become available at the end of the project.

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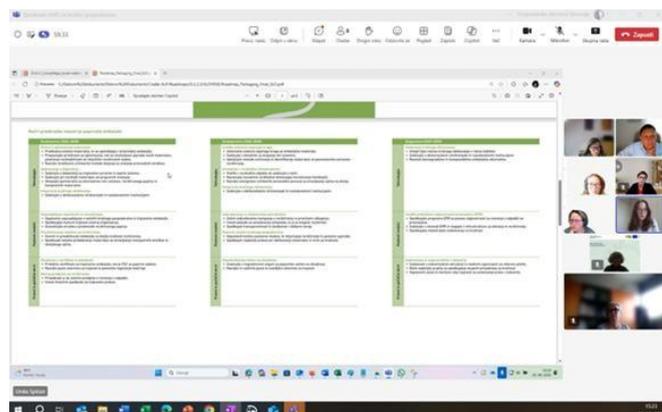


3.7 Slovenia

Date: 25. 9. 2025

Participating entities:

- Host: CCIS – Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- Slovenian Regional Development Fund

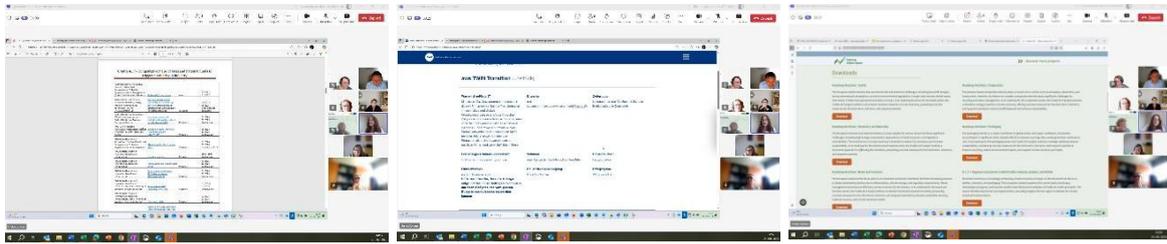


Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations):

- The Slovenian Regional Development Fund (SRDF) and CCIS held a meeting on potential financial instruments to support the circular transformation of SMEs, which SRDF plans to publish by the end of the year. They asked for support in identifying topics on circular transition - highlighted in Slovenia's Smart Specialisation Strategy as a key priority - that should be more effectively implemented in practice, as they plan to design and issue financial instruments to better support companies in their circular transition.
- CCIS responded by presenting the national instruments on the circular economy in the Alpine space. This was done by presenting D3.3.1, to give SRDF a clearer idea of what already exists in European countries, what other countries are tackling, and how they support their economies and SMEs with financial instruments.
- Since SRDF expressed openness to various topics, roadmaps for five sectors - outlining very specific short-, mid-, and long-term steps needed for the circular transformation of these industries – were presented as well.

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- SRDF expressed gratitude, requested all the materials (roadmaps and D3.3.1 – list of financial instruments), and will study them in order to prepare financial instruments - very likely - based on the materials from Cradle-ALP.



3.8 Veneto, IT

Date: 27 October 2025

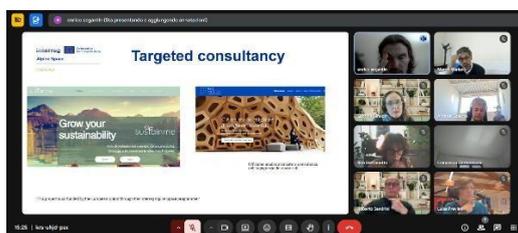
Participating entities:

- Host: Chamber of Commerce of Padova
- Veneto Region - Directorate of Research, Innovation and Energy Competitiveness



Summary of the key points from the discussion (feedback / possible approaches recommendations):

- The Directorate of Research, Innovation and Energy Competitiveness shows a great interest in the results of the Cradle-ALP project, in particular the potential tools to be used for increasing the competitiveness of SMEs and the transformation roadmaps presented.
- The lessons learned from the pilot activities of the Cradle-ALP project and the results coming from the experiences of the SMEs involved, could serve as contribution for the development of the new proposal of the S3 Strategy for the Veneto Region (2026), particularly with reference to the wood/furniture value chains that in the Region is represented by 1 network. The Chamber of Padua will share the Transformation Roadmaps and other tools from the project, including the link to the official website with the Veneto Region
- The representatives of the Veneto Region underlined the utmost importance of the transition to a circular economy for the SMEs, not only in the wood and furniture environment, but in all the economic sectors
- Additional exchange was referred to the possibility to transfer inputs for the upcoming ERDF Programme period with reference to the chance of synchronising transborder calls for proposals, given the opportunity (in the Fondo di Competitività - managed by Veneto Lavoro) of creating transborder partnerships on innovation for the benefit of SMEs located in the Veneto area.



4 Summary / conclusions

Through the policy dialogues, it can be said that across the regions, seven main insights could be identified and summarized. The findings and conclusions are laid out in the following chapter.

4.1 Detailed Summary of key points & insights

- **Designing financial instruments for circular economy:**
 - Regions like Slovenia and Bavaria are preparing funding instruments to support SMEs in circular transition.
 - Slovenian Regional Development Fund (SRDF) is using Cradle-ALP materials and sectoral roadmaps to inform instrument design.
- **Improving synchronization of funding programs:**
 - Synchronization is complex due to administrative differences.
 - Attempts at synchronized funding calls, including those that were implemented, did not yield the desired results (DE & AT).
 - Technology-neutral programs and project-level coordination (e.g., subcontracting) are more feasible.
 - Early stakeholder involvement and long lead times are essential.
- **Enhancing programme flexibility:**
 - Programs should address cross-cutting themes like AI, digitalization and sustainability.
 - Flexibility is needed during both design and implementation phases of projects.
- **Strategic use of existing networks:**
 - Austria recommends using M-ERA.NET for managing synchronized calls.
 - Informal coordination between regional and national levels helps avoid redundancy.
- **Supporting transregional collaboration:**
 - Matchmaking tools, call calendars, and open thematic programs facilitate SME participation.
 - International partnerships must demonstrate added value due to funding constraints.
- **Sector-specific roadmaps and competence centers:**
 - Detailed roadmaps for five sectors provide actionable steps.
 - Roadmaps and piloting experiences could contribute to future of S3 (Veneto Region 2026).
 - Fribourg is establishing a Competence Center for bio-based feedstock valorisation and a joint synchronized R&D call.
- **Project design recommendations:**
 - Projects should be fewer but larger in scope for sustainable outcomes.
 - Regional competition should be encouraged to promote innovation and efficiency.

4.2 Conclusion

The discussions reflect a **shared commitment to advancing the circular economy through strategic funding and collaboration**. Despite challenges in synchronizing funding programs due to administrative and political complexities, most regions see several aspects through which they can move forward aside from the initially suggested synchronized funding schemes and or take up a modified version respectively approach.

Examples for other approaches are:

- Leveraging existing EU frameworks like M-ERA.NET.
- Designing flexible, inclusive funding instruments tailored to regional strengths.
- Promoting transregional cooperation through subcontracting and matchmaking.
- Enabling transborder partnerships on innovation in upcoming ERDF Program (Fondo di Competitivita – managed by Veneto Lavoro) for the benefit of SMEs located in the Veneto area.
- Aligning national and regional priorities with EU strategies and emerging legislative trends.

The insights on piloting with SMEs and shared materials, especially roadmaps and financial instrument overviews, are expected to inform upcoming funding schemes (ERDF) and S3 strategies, marking a pivotal moment for coordinated circular transformation efforts.

5 Annex (documents prepared for policy dialogues)

Information document, guidelines for D.3.2.2 Local Policy dialogues to contribute to S4 finalization (*biz-up*)

→ Cradle-ALP A3.2./D3.2.2.: 7 local groups for contributing to the S4 elaboration & synchronization of regional funds. (AT, CH, 2x DE: S3-4AlpClusters and ARDIA-Net capitalized); IT, SLO, FR: to be started).

Background info S3/S4 strategies:

- S3>S4: **S4- smart specialisation strategies for sustainable and inclusive growth** came up 2020/2021
- S3 – smart specialization strategy was an ex-ante conditionality for the use of EFRE funds for RDI during funding period 2014-2020. Unlike S3 strategy, S4 strategy has not really become established as a term and as prominent for funding period 2021-2027.
- [InfoREGIO - About S3 Smart Specialisation](#): S3 Community of Practice (S3 CoP), the central knowledge and information hub for Smart Specialisation
 - [S3 quotation in EC Communication on a New European Innovation Agenda](#)

[...] over the new programming period 2021-2027, smart specialisation strategies will continue to “play a central role in strengthening regional innovation ecosystems so that they are better equipped to stimulate and sustain economic growth. They provide the framework for ERDF support for research and innovation to the tune of an estimated EUR 56 billion. Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms and partnerships have also become key tools for connecting innovators with similar or complementary strengths and priorities in all Member States and regions, including in technology areas that are key for the twin green and digital transition.
 - Good Governance of National or Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy

In the new programming period 2021-2027, increasing attention has been placed on governance, with a new thematic enabling condition on "Good governance of national or regional smart specialisation strategy", made up of seven fulfilment criteria, namely:

 1. Up-to-date analysis of challenges for innovation diffusion and digitalisation.

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2. Existence of competent regional or national institution or body, responsible for the management of the smart specialisation strategy.
3. Monitoring and evaluation tools to measure performance towards the objective of the strategy.
4. Functioning of stakeholder co-operation (“entrepreneurial discovery process”).
5. Actions necessary to improve national or regional research and innovation system, where relevant.
6. Where relevant, actions to support industrial transition.
7. Measures for enhancing cooperation with partners outside a given Member State in priority areas supported by the smart specialisation strategy.

Nevertheless - even if it is not called S4 - sustainability aims are reflected in the partnership agreements, ROP 2021-2027 and current S3 strategies.

Partnership Agreements on EU funds 2021 – 2027 of Cradle-ALP PPs

Agreements between the European Commission and individual EU countries. They set out the national authorities' plans on how to use [EU funds in shared management in 2021-2027](#).

- 2 May 2022, [Partnership Agreement with Austria – 2021-2027](#)

Agreement between the European Commission and Austria on funding under the common provision regulation 2021/1060.

- 2 June 2022, [Partnership Agreement with France – 2021-2027](#)

Agreement between the European Commission and France on funding under the common provision regulation 2021/1060.

- 19 April 2022, [Partnership Agreement with Germany – 2021-2027](#)

Agreement between the European Commission and Germany on funding under the common provision regulation 2021/1060.

- 25 July 2022, [Partnership Agreement with Italy – 2021-2027](#)

Agreement between the European Commission and Italy on funding under the common provision regulation 2021/1060.

- 12 September 2022, [Partnership Agreement with Slovenia – 2021-2027](#)

Agreement between the European Commission and Slovenia on funding under the common provision regulation 2021/1060.

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Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) 2021 – 2027: Summaries of the Operational Programmes adopted by the European Commission at the beginning of a programming period can be found: [Info regio - Programmes](#)

- Programme IfJG ERDF/JTF 2021-27: Investments in employment, growth and the transition to a low-carbon economy in Austria 2021-2027
[Info regio - Programme IfJG ERDF/JTF 2021-27: Investments in employment, growth and the transition to a low-carbon economy in Austria 2021-2027](#)
- Programme Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and territories Rhône Saône and Massif Central ERDF-ESF+-JTF 2021-2027
[Info regio - Programme Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and territories Rhône Saône and Massif Central ERDF-ESF+-JTF 2021-2027](#)
- Programme ERDF 2021-2027 Baden-Württemberg
[Info regio - Programme ERDF 2021-2027 Baden-Württemberg](#)
- Programme ERDF 2021-2027 Bavaria
[Info regio - Programme ERDF 2021-2027 Bavaria](#)
- RP Veneto ERDF 2021-2027
[Info regio - RP Veneto ERDF 2021-2027](#)
- Slovenia's EU Cohesion Policy Programme 2021-2027
[Info regio - Slovenia's EU Cohesion Policy Programme 2021-2027](#)

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Guideline for the local dialogue meetings / topics for discussion with benefit for Cradle-ALP / agenda proposal:

Online/onsite, max. 1,5 h, as soon as possible! Latest: mid of September!

Target group: policy (S3/S4) and funding programme level of project region

Aim of the meeting:

- Connect with local strategy and policy level, present Cradle-ALP aim, results, road-maps, pilots experiences/learnings with a focus on strategic uptake to support cradle to cradle, circular design and circular substitutions for linear products in industrial manufacturing processes in the Alpine Space.
- Highlight importance of transregional cooperation for exchange of know-how, gaining external know-how for bridging gaps and boost implementation of regional goals.

(S3 Community of Practice (S3 CoP), the central knowledge and information hub for Smart Specialisation, ... one of seven S3 criteria (2021-2027) says: **Measures for enhancing cooperation with partners outside a given Member State in priority areas supported by the smart specialisation strategy.**

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/s3-community-of-practice/about_en)

- Present possibilities for funding transregional cooperation based on Innovation Express Scheme

Goal of the meeting:

- Gain interest for synchronized funding for transregional cooperation projects by means of existing regional/national funding programmes.
- Exchange/discuss on interest and possibilities for synchronizing funding schemes? (linked to A3.3, D.3.3.2 Establishing cooperation and mutual planning of funds to support investments by SMEs on C2C)
- Invitation to info/exchange meeting on Innovation Express with other Cradle-ALP partner regions. (A3.3)

Agenda:

- 10' Welcome!
- 20' Inform on Cradle-ALP, Road-maps..., local pilot activities and/or selected showcases.

(Preparation of PPs: inform yourself on S3 / ROP 2021-2027 in your region respectively break down of the strategy to regional/local level)

- 20' Discussion round 1:

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Reflection of SUSTAINABILITY (Cradle-ALP focus: cradle to cradle, circular design and circular substitutions for linear products in industrial manufacturing processes in the Alpine Space) in local/regional strategies based on current ROP 2021-2027, S3 strategy and related existing or upcoming funding programmes.

- **15' Synchronization of regional funds (definition/explanation)** + history of Innovation Express Scheme & future possibilities – linked to D.3.3.2 -> (slides will be prepared by Iris, to be modified according to regional needs by PPs)
- **20' Discussion round 2:** Discuss if Innovation Express Scheme is of interest. Explore jointly whether suitable regional/national funding programmes for 'synchronization' might be available now or in future.
- **5' Conclusion/Next steps**

The local dialogue meetings are strongly linked to A3.3 (D.3.3.2 Establishing cooperation and mutual planning of funds to support investments by SMEs on C2C)

→ Find Innovation Express Scheme basics on next page.

Background info: Innovation Express Scheme (basics) (A.

Funds synchronization based on Innovation Express Scheme as developed in Ardia-Net project means:

- Funding of transregional cooperation by using existing national/regional/local funding programmes
- **Regions participate to Innovation Express with their own, existing national/regional/local funding programmes**

This scheme offers the following advantages:

- **No** new funding programmes have to be established!
- **No** new legal frameworks have to be developed!
- **No** cross-regional transfer of funds!

Participating regions remain

- in full control of their administrative procedures
- financial management of the call as well as
- and the decision-making process

Applicants are supported

- according to the funding and eligibility rules of the funding programme of the applicant's regions.

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In case of Innovation Express Call 2021 and 2024 only timing and thematic scope of the call were synchronized but were still in line with the topics and application periods of the already existing funding programme.

(Presentation slides will follow from biz-up which can be used for the local dialogue meetings from biz-up.)