



Project Acronym: Cradle-Alp

Project number: ASP0100003

D.3.3.3

Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

WP n°:	3
Task n°:	A3.3
Author(s):	PP02 Technologiezentrum Horb GmbH & Co. KG PP05 Biz-up, Business Upper Austria – OÖ Wirtschaftsagentur GmbH PP09 School of Engineering and Architecture of Fribourg
Contributors:	All project partners
Dissemination level:	PU
Revision:	FINAL
Due Date:	31.10.2025
Date of submission:	31.10.2025

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

Executive Summary

This deliverable documents criteria and schemes for an Innovation Express Call which aims to trigger SMEs transborder cooperation with support of public funds. Whereas the involved Cradle-ALP partners of Upper Austria/AT, Baden-Württemberg/DE and Canton Fribourg/CH targeted to capitalize on Innovation Express Call 2021 (IEC21) and Innovation Express Call 2024 (IEC24) implemented in frame of the Interreg Alpine Space projects ARDIA-Net and INNOBIOVC.

In this document there are following schemes and their criteria outlined:

- For a synchronized call for proposals – Innovation Express Call scheme. The criteria are prepared under consideration of the experiences and learnings of previous IEC2021/2024 and applicable for any future Innovation Express Call to be published by managing authorities in charge for the funding programme of the participating region.
- Canton Fribourg succeeded to publish a synchronized call for proposals between four Universities in Switzerland during the Cradle-ALP project implementation. The specific criteria and schemes of this call are documented as well.
- The German Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) launched a funding measure “Experiment!Material”. This funding scheme encourage transborder cooperation since international or industrial partners can participate as associated (non-funded) collaborators.

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

Contents

1	Introduction to the Cradle-Alp project.....	3
2	Objective Scope.....	3
3	Criteria Scheme for a synchronized call for proposals – Innovation Express Call.....	4
3.1	Criteria of the Call.....	4
3.2	Information on the synchronized funding scheme “Innovation Express Call”	6
4	Criteria Scheme: Synchronized call HES-SO//FR – “Sustainability” 2025	8
4.1	Criteria of the Call.....	8
4.2	Information on the synchronized funding scheme: Synchronized call HES-SO//FR – “Sustainability” 2025	8
5	Criteria Scheme: German Call “Experiment!Material” - 2025	9
5.1	Criteria for the Call	9
5.2	Information on the funding scheme and transnational relevance	10
6	Cradle-ALP conclusion	10

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

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 initiate common cross border funding instruments for the industrial C2C transformation.

2 Objective | Scope

The overarching objective is to boost the implementation of C2C solutions respectively the transformation towards circular economy in the Alpine Space by supporting transnational cooperation based on transnational funds synchronization.

Cradle-ALP builds thereby on the knowledge gained in Interreg Alpine Space projects ARDIA-Net and INNOBIOVC for the development transregional/national funds synchronization.

ARDIA-Net provided a blueprint for cross-regional RDI cooperation and implemented a synchronized call within the framework of the Innovation Express 2021. INNOBIOVC implemented another synchronized call within the Innovation Express 2024.

The Cradle-ALP partners of Upper Austria, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria and Canton Fribourg have been experienced with these previous implemented synchronized calls.

Therefore, those project partners aimed to capitalize on Innovation Express Call 2021 (IEC21) and Innovation Express Call 2024 (IEC24) and prepared criteria and schemes for a synchronized call for proposals.

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

The following criteria and schemes for a synchronized call for proposals are

- prepared under consideration of the experiences and learnings of IEC2021 and IEC2024
- and applicable for any future Innovation Express Call to be published by managing authorities in charge for the funding programme of the participating region.

During the Cradle-ALP project implementation Canton Fribourg succeeded to publish a synchronized call for proposals between four Universities in Switzerland.

When talking about funds synchronization for development of a common cross-border funding instrument aiming at fostering cradle to cradle and circular transformative activities in the Alpine Space, the following aspects need to be mentioned **for a common understanding**:

- a) Funds synchronization based on Innovation Express Scheme, as developed in Ardia-Net and INNOBIOVC projects means:**
 - Funding of transregional cooperation by using existing national/regional/local funding programmes
 - **Regions participate in the Innovation Express Scheme with their own, existing national/regional/local funding instruments**
- b) This scheme offers the following advantages:**
 - **No** new funding programmes have to be established!
 - **No** new legal frameworks need to be developed!
 - **No** cross-regional transfer of funds!
- c) Participating regions remain**
 - in full control of their administrative procedures
 - financial management of the call as well as
 - and the decision-making process
- d) Applicants are supported**
 - according to the funding and eligibility rules of the funding programme of the applicant's regions

Cradle-ALP continued to work according to these basic principles and understanding for supporting the implementation of C2C and circular solution by industry with transnational funds synchronization on the one hand as well as improving the exploitation of the potential of existing regional/national funding programmes and strategies (S3).

3 Criteria | Scheme for a synchronized call for proposals – Innovation Express Call

3.1 Criteria of the Call

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- To be eligible for funding, the applicants must be located within the participating

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

regions.

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

TYPE OF ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

- Eligible applicants are located within a geographical area where an Innovation Express Call funding partner is present.
- Proposals must be submitted by the legal representative of the applicant in accordance with the rules of the respective funding partners.

FURTHER ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- The applicant is a legal entity. Such can be companies in the commercial sector, that have their registered office, a branch or an operating facility in the funding partner's geographical area as well as non-profit non-university research institutions as well as universities and higher education institutions based in the funding partner's geographical area.
- The partner(s) of the applicant and he himself have to be located with a registered office, a branch or an operating facility in a geographical area where an Innovation Express Call funding partner is present.
- Proposed activities must include the participation of partners from at least 3 different partner regions.
- Due to the funding programmes of the participating regions, it is strongly recommended to include at least one SME in the proposal.
- Other eligibility criteria may be defined according to the applicant's regional funding programme and its conditions.

DURATION (start & end)

- Proposals have to be submitted from till

SCOPE AND THEMATIC FIELDS

- The funding call aims to support innovative collaborative projects along transregional C2C/circular value chains in following five priority sectors (Chemistry/Material, Composites, Packaging, Textiles, Wood & Furniture).
- Depending on the applicable funding programme or strategic intentions the topic thematic field(s) of the call can be more specified.

TYPE OF PROJECTS | ACTIVITIES TO BE SUPPORTED

- Projects should align with the principles of C2C or circularity, emphasizing the efficient use of resources, waste reduction, and the creation of value-added products. Further, the call emphasizes creation of innovative collaborations among stakeholders from the priority sectors Chemistry/Material, Composites, Packaging, Textiles, Wood & Furniture.
- Innovation Express Call funding partners (funding programmes) support proposals submitted by a consortium of applicants which are eligible according to the rules of the funding programme of the region each of them belongs to. E.g.

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

SME, research organizations or centres, large companies, technology providers, universities etc. located in the geographical area of the participating regions and addressing a collaborative activity across borders. A broad variety of innovation activities (according to the regional funding programmes) are supported, as well as many different stages of collaboration. **The proposed activities must include the participation of partners from at least e.g. 3 different partner regions.**

3.2 Information on the synchronized funding scheme “Innovation Express Call”

The overall aim of transregional fund synchronization in frame of Cradle-ALP is supporting the implementation of Cradle 2 Cradle and circular solutions, circular design and circular substitutions for linear products in industrial manufacturing processes in the Alpine Space

- by enabling transregional cooperation of entrepreneurs and R&D institutions
- based on synchronization of existing regional/national funding programmes
- WITHOUT establishing new funding programmes,
- without developing new legal frameworks and
- without cross-regional transfer of funds.

WHAT IS INNOVATION EXPRESS CALL

IEC is a joint call for proposals implemented by synchronizing existing regional funding schemes in the Alpine Space.

It represents a joint approach of Alpine-Space regions for supporting companies, especially SMEs, in transborder cooperation projects to boost the implementation of C2C solutions respectively the transformation towards circular economy in the Alpine Space.

Synchronizing of existing regional funding programmes under the IEC means:

- Regions participate with their own, existing regional funding programmes.
- Participating regions remain in full control of their administrative procedures, financial management of the call as well as the decision-making process.
- Funding and eligibility rules apply according to the regional funding programme of the applicant’s regions.
- Applications will be evaluated based on their potential to create benefits for participating applicants, to contribute to the competitiveness of the regional economy and in accordance with the criteria from the respective regional/national funding programmes.

CIRCULAR ALPINE SPACE COMMUNITY

- Previous Innovation Express Calls showed that for a successful implementation a strong network of BSO for facilitating matchmakings (online and onsite) is necessary to establish network of potential applicants.

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

- Cradle-ALP projects partner therefor facilitated webinars and matchmaking events in order to attract potential interested in transborder cooperation and to foster first contacts.
- [Home | Cradle-ALP – Circular Alpine Space community](#)

VIRTUAL COORDINATION OFFICE

- It is operated in cooperation with BSOs of at least two partner regions and acts as the first point of contact for the joint call.
- The coordination office organizes several (virtual) events to introduce the call, to facilitate matchmaking of potential applicants and facilitate the project development.
- It provides information to interested applicants, arrange adjustment meetings with programme owners, collects the joint application summary form.
- The BSOs of the participating regions strongly support the coordination office.

PROJECT APPLICATION PROCESS:

- Networking: BSOs of participating regions organize information webinars and facilitate matchmaking events (online and onsite)
- Project initiation: BSOs of participating regions are first contact points for project ideas and contact the coordination office and BSOs of partner regions for identification of project partners.
- Coordination office forwards information on project development to the funding partners and arrange exchange meetings between funding authorities – if necessary.
- Project application lead submits an English summary to the coordination office. The coordination office forwards the application summary to the funding authorities it may concern.
- Each project partner submits the full application in local language according to the rules of the funding programme of its region. Proposals must be in line with the supported innovation activities and other guidelines outlined by the funding agency responsible in the applicant's geographical area.
- Again, the coordination office is available to arrange exchange meetings between funding authorities – if necessary.
- The relevant funding authorities evaluate the application in accordance with the criteria from the respective regional/national funding programmes. They remain in full control of their administrative procedures, financial management of the call as well as the decision-making process. All general and usual funding rules of the participating national/regional funding programmes apply.
- Coordination office keeps participants informed on the evaluation progress.

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

4 Criteria |Scheme: Synchronized call HES-SO//FR – “Sustainability” 2025¹

4.1 Criteria of the Call

CONDITIONS

Projects must meet the conditions of the HES-SO//FR R&D fund regulations and will be carried out in accordance with these regulations.

- Specifically for projects under this call, the following conditions apply:
- This call for projects is a synchronized effort among the 4 schools of HES- SO//FR. Therefore, submitted projects must involve HEG-FR, HEdS-FR, HETS- FR, and HEIA-FR (minimum 10% of the budget for each institution).
- **The participation of third parties (regional, national, or international) in scientific, technical, commercial, and/or financial forms is strongly encouraged.**
- Projects must include at least one of the following commercialization prospects:
 - Submission of a project or offer for a subsequent mandate
 - Provision of a tool/dataset/site/other deliverable that can be used by a defined community (OpenData or similar modality)
 - Protectable intellectual property
- Project deliverables must include at least one proof of concept: a demo or lab system, a case study, or any other relevant element demonstrating the potential for practical field implementation at the end of the R&D project. This proof of concept may relate to a service, product, or tool in the broad sense, implemented in coordination with a company, association, or independent public entity.

Deadline of projects considered in this call is before November 21, 2025 to be submitted to the Directorate of HES-SO//FR.

FORMAL ASPECTS

- Project start date before May 1, 2026 (decision communicated in January 2026)
- Maximum duration: 24 months
- Maximum contribution from the HES-SO//FR R&D fund: CHF 650,000 (this limit does not necessarily have to be reached)
- One project at most will be financed

4.2 Information on the synchronized funding scheme: Synchronized call HES-SO//FR – “Sustainability” 2025

TOPIC

This call for proposals is aimed at projects that will strengthen and accelerate sustainable transformation and circular transition with a verifiable impact in the canton of Fribourg.

¹ This is a translation of the original call document in French and German

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

The proposed projects must have an impact in one or more of the following areas:

- Human mobility
- Natural and built environment
- Environmental performance of industrial activities
- Human health (including aging population)

Projects are expected to align with the UN's sustainable development goals, particularly the following five goals, which are considered priorities in this call for proposals:

- Good health and well-being
- Gender equality
- Affordable and clean energy
- Decent work and economic growth
- Sustainable cities and communities

Projects should enable the establishment of a joint and sustainable R&D and/or service offering by the universities of applied sciences of the HES-SO//FR and facilitate partnerships with relevant entities at regional, national or international levels.

5 Criteria |Scheme: German Call “Experiment!Material” - 2025

5.1 Criteria for the Call

The German Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) launched a funding measure “Experiment!Material”. This program supports disruptive, exploratory research ideas in materials science aiming to demonstrate feasibility for novel or unconventional hypotheses, methods, and technologies. It is part of the national framework “Material Innovations for the Transformation of Economy and Society (Mat2Twin)”, embedded within the overarching European-oriented strategy “Technological Sovereignty in Germany and Europe (FITS 2030)”.

Eligible applicants are universities and public research institutions in Germany.

Projects must:

- focus on early-stage, high-risk research
- address new or improved materials, synthesis, or processing methods
- adopt disruptive approaches rather than incremental innovation
- run for a maximum of 18 months
- and may include international or industrial partners as associated (non-funded) collaborators

Funding covers up to 100% of eligible costs plus a 20% overhead for universities. Submission deadlines are annual between 2025 and 2029, and the program runs until 31 December 2036.

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

5.2 Information on the funding scheme and transnational relevance

While “Experiment!Material” is a national German program, its design and thematic scope offer significant potential for transregional synchronization under the Innovation Express approach. The measure’s focus on early-stage, high-risk materials innovation directly complements the Cradle-ALP objectives of fostering Cradle-to-Cradle and Circular Economy solutions across Alpine regions.

The program allows:

- participation of associated international partners
- utilization of results within the European Economic Area and Switzerland
- and thematic alignment with European strategies on technological sovereignty and sustainable materials innovation

Therefore, “Experiment!Material” could serve as a model case for transregional fund synchronization by:

- coupling early-stage exploratory research (Germany) with application-oriented circular innovation
- aligning national programs under a shared call scheme
- and fostering the creation of joint Innovation Express Calls addressing sustainable and circular material transitions in the Alpine Space.

This would strengthen the transnational funding ecosystem and directly contribute to Cradle-ALP’s mission of triggering cross-border cooperation between SMEs and research institutions through synchronized public funding instruments.

6 Cradle-ALP conclusion

Canton Fribourg published a joint call for proposals of four Swiss Universities. It’s a modified application of the Innovation Express Call scheme with a focus on joint projects of different Swiss Universities – **but explicitly welcome cooperation with abroad.**

Based on experiences of IEC2024 in frame of INNOBIOVC project, during Cradle-ALP implementation and the local policy dialogues in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Upper Austria in these regions no further joint call for proposals was published.

Summarized, facilitating

- cooperation between single projects: linking existing projects across regions for knowhow exchange & learning from each other & exploration of cooperation potentials
- transregional cooperation through subcontracting of bottom-up and demand- driven approaches by SMEs
- cross-regional cooperation projects: supporting bottom-up transregional project ideas by identifying regional/national funding programmes welcoming foreign consortium partners but without funding
- joint synchronized calls & coordination office: pushing top-down implementation of strategic priorities

Cradle-ALP – Triggering SMEs transborder cooperation with the support of public funds

are considered as practicable options for trans-border cooperation with existing regional/national funding schemes in the Alpine Space but preferred differently by the Cradle-ALP project partners regions.

Backed by a strong active network of business support organizations (chambers, clusters, business agencies, transfer centers etc.) for partner search, facilitating matchmaking and supporting applications, **there are viable models of synchronization recommended by Cradle-ALP (for details see D.3.3.2).**