



**Project Acronym: Cradle-Alp**

**Project number: ASP0100003**

## **0.3.1**

**From S3 to S4: policy convergence  
towards transnational S4 strategies in  
selected thematic areas from the  
project's priority sectors**

# Cradle-ALP – From S3 to S4: policy convergence towards transnational S4 strategies

## Executive Summary

This output is based on the implementation of local policy dialogues performed by the project partners either on regional and/or national level. Insights to these policy dialogues are to be found in D.3.2.2. “Local Policy dialogues to contribute to S4 finalisation”. Further this output is strongly linked to D.3.3.2 “Establishing cooperation and mutual planning of funds to support investments by SMEs on C2C”.

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

This project is co-funded by the European Union through the Interreg Alpine Space programme.

### CRADLE-ALP POLICY DIALOGUES – S3 TO S4

Results of the discussions with policy makers and representatives within the Alpine Space Region

Interreg  Co-funded by the European Union  
Alpine Space

Cradle-ALP



#### WHAT IS S4 AND WHY IT MATTERS

- Smart Specialisation Strategies (introduced around 2020/2021) for sustainable and inclusive growth
- Integrates sustainability and circular economy goals into regional development strategies

#### KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE TRANSITION

- **Governance requirements:** New enabling conditions for S4 include good governance, stakeholder cooperation, and industrial transition measures.
- **Limited awareness:** S4 is less prominent compared to S3, requiring stronger communication and policy uptake.



#### S4 ACTIVITIES IN THE ALPINE SPACE

- **Financial instruments:** Slovenia and Bavaria are developing SME support tools using Cradle-ALP roadmaps.
- **Roadmaps:** Five sectors provide actionable steps for circular transition.
- **Competence centers:** Fribourg is creating a center for bio-based feedstock valorisation.

#### IMPACT IN THE ALPINE SPACE

- **Alignment with EU priorities:** Supports green and digital transitions.
- **Influence on future strategies:** Roadmaps and pilot learnings will inform ERDF and S3/S4 strategies for 2026 and beyond.



# Cradle-ALP – From S3 to S4: policy convergence towards transnational S4 strategies

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## Contents

1	Objective and scope.....	3
2	7 Local policy dialogues .....	3
3	Summary / conclusions .....	4

# Cradle-ALP – From S3 to S4: policy convergence towards transnational S4 strategies

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## 1 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.

### 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 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)

## 2 7 Local policy dialogues

- Austria #1, Date: 01.10.2025  
Participating entities: Business Upper Austria – Upper Austrian Business Agency & BOKU University (hosts), Policy and Location Strategy Department at Business Upper Austria, responsible for the regional economy and research strategy, FFG – Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft (Austrian Research Funding Organisation)
- Austria #2, Date: 09.10. 09.2025  
Participating entities: Business Upper Austria – Upper Austrian Business Agency (host), 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)

# Cradle-ALP – From S3 to S4: policy convergence towards transnational S4 strategies

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- Bavaria, DE, Date: 25.09.2025  
Participating entities: CCB – Chemistry Cluster Bavaria (host), 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
- Baden-Württemberg, DE, Date: 29.08.2025  
Participating entities: TZ-Horb a.N. (host), Wirtschaftsförderung Horb a.N., Wirtschaftsförderung NSW, Landratsamt FDS, VDI|VDE|IT Stuttgart, RegioClusterAgentur für Innovation Transformation, Baden-Württemberg
- 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
- Rhone-Alpes, FR, Date: 1 October 2025  
Participating entities: POLYMERIS (host), Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes
- Slovenia, Date: 25. 9. 2025  
Participating entities: CCIS – Chamber of Commerce & Industry (host), Slovenian Regional Development Fund
- Veneto, IT, Date: 27 October 2025  
Participating entities: Chamber of Commerce of Padova (host), Veneto Region - Directorate of Research, Innovation and Energy Competitiveness

### 3 Summary / conclusions

The policy dialogues revealed a shared effort across regions to advance the circular economy, particularly through the design of targeted financial instruments. Regions such as Slovenia and Bavaria are actively developing funding schemes to support SMEs in their circular transition, drawing on tools like sectoral roadmaps and materials from initiatives such as Cradle-ALP. These approaches aim to better align financial support with the practical needs of businesses while encouraging innovation in sustainable practices.

However, synchronizing funding programs across regions remains a significant challenge due to administrative and political differences. Past attempts at coordinated funding calls, particularly in Germany and Austria, have shown limited success. As a result, regions are shifting toward more feasible alternatives, such as technology-neutral programs and project-level coordination mechanisms like subcontracting. Early stakeholder engagement and longer preparation timelines have also been identified as critical factors for improving coordination outcomes.

Flexibility has emerged as another key priority in program design and implementation. Funding schemes need to accommodate cross-cutting themes such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, and sustainability, while also allowing adaptability throughout project lifecycles. At the same time, regions are encouraged to make strategic use of existing networks and

## Cradle-ALP – From S3 to S4: policy convergence towards transnational S4 strategies

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frameworks—such as M-ERA.NET—and to strengthen informal coordination between regional and national authorities to reduce duplication and improve efficiency.

Finally, the dialogues emphasize the importance of transregional collaboration and strategic project design. Tools like matchmaking platforms, coordinated call calendars, and open thematic programs can enhance SME participation, while international partnerships must clearly demonstrate added value. Sector-specific roadmaps and competence centers are seen as valuable instruments for guiding innovation, and there is a growing consensus that fewer but larger-scale projects can deliver more sustainable impact. Overall, these insights point toward a more flexible, collaborative, and strategically aligned approach to funding the circular economy across regions.