
Cross-border spatial development in the Alpine Convention area

Executive Summary

Florian Lintzmeyer (ifuplan), Tobias Chilla, Markus Lambracht (FAU)

1. Background

In the European context, the Alps are characterised by a comparatively high density of national borders. This poses a challenge to spatial policies in a larger territorial context, which is why the Alpine Convention in its Implementation Protocol on Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development (SPSD) emphasizes that certain problems can only be resolved in a cross-border framework and require joint measures on the part of the Alpine countries. The SPSD places a particular focus on fostering cross-border cooperation among its Contracting Parties. This includes the promotion of cross-border cooperation between local and regional bodies, the elimination of obstacles for international cooperation, the harmonisation in policies for territorial planning, and international cooperation regarding territorial plans and programmes.

In its first mandate phase and to provide the basis for future activities, the Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development Working Group has carried out an assessment of the status-quo and future needs of cross-border cooperation in spatial planning and spatial development between Alpine countries and their regions.

The assessment study was able to draw on previous activities of the Alpine Convention:

- Declaration on Sustainable Spatial Development in the Alps (Declaration of Murnau, 2016), reiterating the need for integrated and cross-border spatial

planning in the Alps and highlighting recent spatially relevant challenges that have arisen since the adoption of the SPSD.

- International Conference « Sustainable Spatial Development in the Alps » (Munich, 2016), discussing
- ESPON Targeted Analysis Alps 2050

2. Methodology

The assessment study was conducted primarily as a desktop research and screening of relevant documents for references. The research focus was on references to existing or formerly existing forms of cross-border cooperation as well as on references to future needs of action. Documents included official sources from the Alpine Convention such as Compliance Committee Reports, national compliance reports as well as relevant literature at the transnational Alpine level. In addition, relevant literature at the national level was screened in regard to references to cross-border cooperation for specific border regions between two or three Alpine countries. In many cases, the identified literature references required additional desktop research of documents and internet sources in order to fill information gaps.

The assessment study initially focussed on institutionalised respectively permanent forms of cross-border cooperation. During its elaboration, it became obvious that projects carried out in the Interreg framework play a significant ground-breaking role as incubators and initiators for an intensified continuous cross-border cooperation. Thus, a quantitative analysis of Interreg projects from nine Interreg A and one Interreg B (Alpine Space Programme) programme has been conducted based on the EU KEEP database.

Alpine Convention perimeter (green) and national borders (black)



Source: Alpine Convention Atlas

To complete the literature screening with current activities and to avoid significant gaps, expert interviews were conducted with 22 spatial planning experts representing authorities, scientific

institutions and planning associations from Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland.

It has to be noted, though, that despite all efforts, this assessment study is not claiming to provide a comprehensive picture, given the dimension and also the difficulty to delimit spatial planning from sector-specific cooperation. By definition, the assessment study did not attempt to evaluate individual forms of cooperation, their impact on the territory or how they manage to achieve their defined objectives.

3. Results

Transnational level

At the transnational level, involving more than two adjacent Alpine countries, examples of cross-border cooperation include

- Cooperation between international governmental and non-governmental organisations and partners (Alpine Convention, EUSALP, Interreg, networks e.g. AlpPlan, Alpine Soil Partnership, ALPARC, PLANAT, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation)
- Implementation of (EU) directives (SEA), agreements (Treaty of Karlsruhe) and labels (Alpine Pearls, Mountaineering villages, CESBA)
- Sector-specific studies (CrossBorder, Alpine Nature 2030) and initiatives (Green hydrogen for the Alps)

It is important to note that binding and institutionalised forms of cross-border cooperation have not been identified on a broader basis. According to the analysed documents and/or experts interviewed, needs for action at the transnational level include

- Implementation guidelines and target values for the SPSPD protocol
- Cross-border spatial observation (e.g. in regard to functional areas or open spaces)
- Improved communication between federal authorities on projects with cross-border effects as well as in drafting spatial plans
- Cross-border funding schemes
- Thematic cross-border spatial concepts (e.g. ecological network) and institutionalised linkages between spatial planning and related policy fields.

Analysis of Interreg projects

Bilateral cooperation

This paragraph outlines the results for specific cross-border areas within the Alpine Convention perimeter.

Austria-Italy

The Brenner corridor is the focal area of cross-border cooperation between the Austrian province of Tyrol and the Italian Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, but cooperation

also takes place between Upper Carinthia, East Tyrol and Südtirol/Alto Adige. Examples for cooperation include

- Cooperative spatial development projects (brenner.basis.raum, Fit4cooperation, SüdAlpenRaum/Spazio Sud-Alpino)
- EGTC regions (European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino, Euregio ohne Grenzen/Senza Confini)
- Elaboration of basic information for spatial planning (ISA-MAP data harmonisation, SUSPLAN cross-border information basis and planning procedures)
- Sectoral cooperation in the fields of ecological connectivity, avalanche warning and forecasting and specifically on safeguarding of cultural heritage and mountain agriculture and economic traditions (joint agreement, Memorandum of Understanding)

Expressed needs for action for the Austrian-Italian border region include a stronger cross-border governance system, also reaching across political and administrative borders as well as intensified cross-border cooperation in the field of protected area management, transport and natural risk management, encompassing the integration and joint planning of measures.

Austria-Slovenia

Examples of cross-border cooperation in the Austrian-Slovenian border region include

- Joint committee Slovenia-Carinthia, addressing issues of cross-border relevance with one focus on spatial planning
- Cross-border plans (GREMA masterplan, goMURra water management plan) and planning approaches (SUSPLAN)
- Sector-specific initiatives (Karawanken@Zukunft.EU / Karavanke@Prihodnost.eu, Karawanks UNESCO Global Geopark, Trans-Borders mobility projects, CULTH:EX CAR-GOR built cultural heritage project)

Austria-Switzerland

The Alpine Rhine valley is the focus of cross-border cooperation between Austria and Switzerland in the fields of open space protection (Freiraum Rheintal), water management (Rhesi project Recreation and Safety in the framework of the International Rhine Regulation) and tourism (Velotal Rheintal). In a broader context, Austria is in most cases also represented in the various forms of cooperation in the Lake Constance area outlined in the chapter on Swiss-German cross-border below.

Additionally, the Interreg council Terra Raetica has institutionalised cooperation between Austrian (Landeck, Imst), Swiss (Grison) and Italian (Vinschgau) districts in the form of community-led local development (CLLD) initiatives on various topics.

Austria-Germany

Cross-border cooperation between Austria and Germany includes

- Formalised cooperation and consultation structures and agreements (« Bergener Resolution », cross-border participation schemes regarding retail

projects and spatial plans, route identification for the Brenner base tunnel access)

- Cooperation in concepts and strategies (Border Region Strategy 2021-2027, Salzburg Masterplan) and spatial analysis (EuLE, SABE-V, Study « Cross-border land management »)
- Sector-specific cooperation (cross-border protected area Alpenpark Karwendel, visitor management, Saalach flood protection, local cross-border transport connections)

Cross-border cooperation is particularly pronounced between the Southeastern Bavarian regions of Berchtesgadener Land and Traunstein and the Province of Salzburg, with a long-standing tradition of cooperating in the Euregio framework.

Needs for an intensified cross-border cooperation include

- Taking advantage of the EGTC instrument and better coordination of funds and cross-programme regional strategies
- Coordinated approaches to reduce and restrict private transport, address tourist competition and cluster risks in winter tourism and strengthen the cross-border dimension of protected areas
- Harmonisation of cross-border commuter statistics

France-Italy

In the French-Italian border region, examples of cross-border cooperation include

- Institutionalised cooperation schemes (Nice Côte d'Azur – Genoa – Torino – Monaco, EGTC Parc européen / Parco europeo Alpi Marittime – Mercantour) and bodies (CAFI, Conference Hautes Vallées/Territoire des Hautes Vallées)
- Integrated Territorial Plans (PITER CoeurAlp and subsequent initiatives, Terres Monviso) and regional initiatives (Espace Mont Blanc)
- Regional sectoral initiatives on climate change (AdaPT Mont Blanc, ARTACLIM), transport (CoerAlp en mouvement, ALPIMED MOBIL), balanced territorial development (Pay-sages) and protected area management and ecological connectivity (integrated plan for the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Monviso, Biodiv'Alp)

France-Switzerland

For the French-Swiss border region, cooperation examples include

- Formalised bodies (Conseil du Léman) and agreements (Corridor contracts in the Franco-Valdo-Geneva conurbation, Agglomeration programm Greater Geneva Area, envisaged Rhone River Framework Agreement)
- Spatial analysis (Radioscopie des polarités du sillon alpin) and conceptual studies (PlanETer).

France-Monaco

France and Monaco cooperate in joint settlement and infrastructure projects, one example being the Zone d'Aménagement Concertée Saint Antoine, a joint multi-functional brownfield development.

Germany-Switzerland

Within the Alpine Convention perimeter, Germany and Switzerland share only a water border, no direct land border. Still, the Lake Constance border region features a long-standing and intensive tradition of cooperation between the Alpine countries of Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

Examples of cross-border cooperation between Germany and Switzerland include

- Institutionalised cooperation bodies (International Lake Constance Conference and Parliament, Lake Constance Spatial Planning Commission, Lake Constance Metropolitan Area)
- Spatial concepts and strategies (Target Vision Space and Transport, DACH+ including regional adaptation to climate change)

A need for more cooperation is seen in the development of cross-border energy plans and the noise conflict resolution regarding expansion plans of Zurich International Airport.

Italy-Slovenia

Examples for cooperation in the Italian-Slovenian border region include

- Institutionalised cooperation bodies (Joint Committee Friuli Venezia Giulia – Republic of Slovenia, Italian-Slovenian Permanent Bilateral Commission for Water Management) and structures (EGTC GO - Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba)
- Spatial strategies and concepts (CONSPACE, TRANSLAND, Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies, SUMP Nova Gorica for cross-border mobility, FORTIS)
- Protected area management (Transboundary Ecoregion Julian Alps, GeoKarst)
- Spatial observation and data (ISA-MAP)

In regard to functional areas, a need of action was seen in more targeted strategies to overcome border-related obstacles and tap into possible synergies at regional, cross-border level (e.g. risk prevention capacities and disaster management).

Italy-Switzerland

In the Italian-Swiss border region, examples of cooperation include

- (no longer active) institutionalised bodies (Working Communities Region Insubrica and Region Sempione, Conseil Valais-Vallée d'Aoste du Grand St Bernard) and agreements (NEAT bilateral agreement),
- Transport (suburban train between Mendrisio and Varese, SMISTO project on mobility between Ticino and Lombardy) and water-related (RESERAQUA) initiatives,

- and the cooperation between the Transboundary parks Parco naturale Alpe Veglia - Alpe Devero/Binntal Landscape Park.

Needs for action include efforts to reduce economic differences along border regions and taking advantage of changes to the Swiss Federal Parks Ordinance, facilitating cross-border protected areas.

Liechtenstein – Austria / Switzerland

Liechtenstein and the neighbouring Swiss region Werdenberg cooperated in the framework of the 3rd generation of Swiss agglomeration programmes. Measures included securing public and open spaces within settlement areas to mitigate urban heat effects related to climate change. Municipalities of the Austrian province Vorarlberg also participated in the process.

Quantitative analysis of INTERREG projects

INTERREG projects are an important impulse for cross-border cooperation in the Alps and they are part of the Alpine territorial governance. Therefore, a quantitative analysis was conducted based on the information of the EU KEEP-database. This approach provides an overview of the thematic foci in INTERREG programmes. The analysis does not reflect on the quality or output of the projects but on the involved cooperation intensity. The analysis comprises the INTERREG V-B Alpine Space Programme (ASP) and nine INTERREG V-A programmes that overlap with the Alpine Convention perimeter. 64 ASP projects are accompanied by nine relevant INTERREG V-A programmes with 92.5 projects in average. The number of projects per cross-border programme area varies significantly. The transnational and the cross-border programmes show significant differences concerning their thematic focus. The KEEP-database allows attributing up to three thematic foci for each project. Key findings for INTERREG V-A-programmes include:

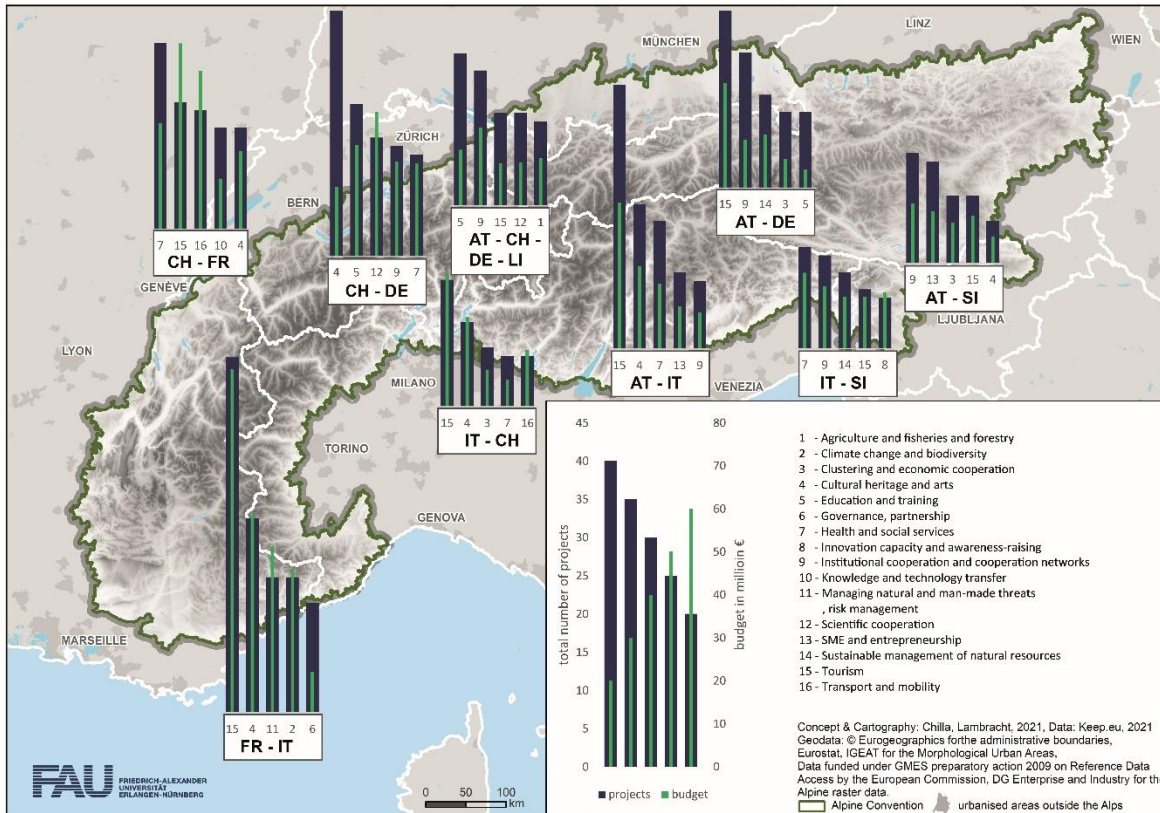
- The 5 most frequent topics include tourism, cultural heritage and arts, health and social services, institutional cooperation and cooperation networks and education and training.
- Topics with a clear reference to spatial planning and territorial governance can be found in the following categories: Institutional cooperation and cooperation networks (rank 4 out of 42 thematic categories), Governance/partnership (20), Regional planning and development (22), Urban development (33), Rural and peripheral development (39).

Findings for the INTERREG V-B Alpine Space Programme:

- The 5 most frequently mentioned topics are regional planning and development, governance/partnership, climate change and biodiversity, sustainable management of natural resources and innovation capacity and awareness-raising.
- Topics with a clear relation to spatial planning and territorial governance are positioned as follows: Regional planning and development (rank 1 out of 39 thematic categories), Governance/partnership (2), Institutional cooperation and cooperation networks (10) and Rural and peripheral development (29).

Comparing the two programme strands, overarching topics such as regional planning and development, governance, but also green topics and transport and mobility play a bigger role in the Alpine Space Programme than in the INTERREG V-A programmes.

Top 5 thematic foci in the different INTERREG V—A programme areas



Source: keep database 2021 / Elaboration: FAU

References in selected spatial development strategies

The following table contains a selection of references national spatial development strategies make in regard to cross-border cooperation. The collection does not claim to be exhaustive or comparable, but rather gives an indication of each country's specific perspective on cross-border cooperation in spatial planning and development.

Austrian Spatial Development Concept 2030

Pillar 4 Vertical and horizontal governance:

- Active participation in European strategies and processes (e.g. Green Deal, Territorial Agenda, New Leipzig-Charta, Urban Agenda, ESPON, Biodiversity Strategy, EUSALP, EU Funding Programmes, Alpine Convention, cross-border cooperation formats (EGTC, agglomeration programmes)
- Supporting mechanisms including bilateral and transnational cooperation structures and processes
- Cross-border and European spatial development as one of six cross-cutting aspects
- Young Expert priority issue "Regional centers - coordinated polycentric structures" requires supra-regional and cross-border development concepts

French Schéma interrégional du massif des Alpes

Three approaches to promote cross-border dynamic:

- Improving connectivity: Winter openings and service frequencies of railroad

- Promoting joint opportunities and land use in regard to tourism, culture, production systems, social services, education and research, labour market and natural hazards / Establishment of a cross-border stakeholder network
- Cross-border project areas at the regional or state level

Concepts and Strategies for Spatial Development in Germany (2016)

- Cooperation potentials in cross-border functional areas shall be exploited and cross-border issues, planning approaches and coordination procedures must be focussed on.
- Strengthening of cross-border cooperation in metropolitan regions and areas
- Cross-border cooperation with neighbouring states e.g. in regional planning
- Cross-border spatial monitoring

Italian Regional Territorial Plans

- No spatial planning competence at national level, but Regional Territorial Plans (PTR) for Italian Alpine border regions address cross-border cooperation
- These references include cross-border cooperation bodies, corridors for territorial integration, macro-strategies and innovative governance models and socio-cultural relations.
- The focus often lies on voluntary approaches and the use of territorial cooperation instruments, e.g. in regard to cross-border protected areas.

Spatial Development Strategy Slovenia 2050 (2020 draft document for consultation)

- Reference to spatial/territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional areas (EU Territorial Agenda 2030)
- Urban areas in border regions play a leading role in spatial development at cross-border level → creation of cross-border integrated settlement and economic systems
- As part of major European geographical regions, Slovenia is taking an active role in macro-regional and cross-border integration (addressing common issues, development challenges) → strengthening of border towns, forming of cross-border wider urban areas (e.g. Gorizia, Carinthia) → joint development programs and projects to solve common cross-border problems and development challenges, establishment of cross-border associations

Spatial Concept Switzerland

- Make better use of border locations (urban, rural and alpine) through cross-border strategies (e.g. Métropole Lémanique, Northeastern Switzerland) and projects for cross-border functional areas
- Mapping signatures: "Cross-border coordination of settlement and landscape" → transport, energy infrastructure and settlement development / "Cross-border cooperation in nature and tourism", e.g. Espace Mont-Blanc
- Federal level is expected to improve conditions for cross-border cooperation by participating in European spatial development projects and supporting cantons, cities and municipalities in cross-border cooperation
- Cantons are called upon to further enhance settlement and landscape in urban and rural areas in a cross-border perspective
- Promotion of cross-border cooperation for specific areas of activity, including the following in the Alpine Convention perimeter: Metropolitan areas: Métropole Lémanique / Areas characterized by small- and medium sized towns: Città Ticino, Northeastern Switzerland / Alpine areas: Western and Eastern Alps

Liechtenstein Spatial Development Concept

- Cross-border cooperation essential for Liechtenstein
- Mobility as future focus of cross-border cooperation
- Relational networks with bordering territories Rhine Valley, Province of Vorarlberg, Canton of Grisons on topics such as transport and mobility
- Infrastructure development and supply structures need to be coordinated with Switzerland

Success factors, obstacles and future needs of action

Literature suggests a range of obstacles and challenges to cross-border cooperation. The ESPON COMPASS analysis argues that the combination of low population densities, low industrial activity and high natural value creates the challenge for spatial planning to stimulate development and at the same time preserve the natural heritage. Different regulations at national level often influence bottom-up cooperation across borders. Other studies identify the

lacking consideration of border regions in plans and concepts, lacking legal obligations and financial incentives, different governance structures and institutional barriers, lacking mandates and lacking municipal representation in border-regional strategies as challenges for spatial planning in border regions.

In the course of the expert interviews, the interview partners were asked to prioritise a set of possible success factors and obstacles on a scale from 1 (very low relevance) to 5 (highly relevant). It has to be reiterated that the following results are not statistically valid or representative. Nonetheless, the responses are an indication of stakeholder perceptions on cross-border cooperation on spatial issues in the Alps.

The five most important success factors in the eyes of the interview partners are the cross-border relevance of the issues at stake, a win-win situation arising from cross-border cooperation, personal contacts among stakeholders, shared perception of the problem and European cooperation projects.

In regard to obstacles, interview partners view institutional, political, legal and relational obstacles – in the sense of interpersonal relations, differences in legitimacy, experience and leadership, level of trust etc. – as the four most important obstacles.

The four most important needs for an intensified cross-border cooperation are seen in the fields of :

- transport: including cross-border commuting, modal shift and intermodality, climate neutrality, integration of transport, energy and settlement development, cross-border transport planning and mobility management
- climate change, including climate-neutrality and resilience, linkages with biodiversity and species shift, biodiversity of ecosystems at high altitudes
- natural hazards, particularly monitoring and management of natural hazard processes
- tourism, particularly tourist mobility and last mile.

4. Outlook

The assessment study illustrates how the diversity of the Alps is reflected in the topics and forms of cross-border cooperation in spatial planning. “Hot spots” for cooperation such as the Lake Constance area, the Espace Mont-Blanc, Southeastern Bavaria/Salzburg, cooperation along the Brenner axis and between Friuli Venezia Giulia and Slovenia can be identified which are in many cases rooted in a long-standing cross-border thinking. There is a huge potential in the Alpine Convention perimeter for exchange of experience and mutual learning and inspiration.

At the same time, it also became clear that formalised spatial planning is overwhelmingly still very much confined to national and regional administrative borders and does not yet live up to the ambitions of the Alpine Convention and its Protocol on Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development. In the future and focussing on integrated cross-border areas, the establishment of more formalised structures for cross-border spatial planning – equipped with decision-making competences and funds - could be a promising approach to effectively promote harmonious cross-border territorial development in the Alps.