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EUSALP Action Group 6

Work Plan 2023-2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the third Thematic Policy Area "Environment and Energy" of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) Action Group 6 (AG6) focuses on the most important challenges and opportunities concerning natural and cultural resources including water. The Alpine region is characterised by a particular wealth of these natural and cultural resources, such as the rich biodiversity of the mountainous habitats and the cultural diversity, which are assets of a high-quality living area. The resources of the Alpine region are widely used and there is strong competition in particular for land and water for several purposes, including energy, households, tourism, agriculture, forestry and industry. Against this background, EUSALP AG6 is aiming to provide sustainable and balanced models of resource management and production to enable also future generations to enjoy the unique living space of the Alps. EUSALP Action Group 6 addresses this objective towards a more inclusive environmental framework and renewable energy solutions as well as the need for sustainable development and the preservation of the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Alpine Region.

Based on the current needs concerning the Alpine Region and the evaluation of the achievements of the previous AG6 Work Plan 2020 - 2022, AG6 members have collectively identified priority topics for 2023 - 2025. In this respect EUSALP Action Group 6 aims to realise its objectives through a series of activities in the following **four main thematic clusters**: water, forestry and agriculture, soil and biodiversity, as well as cultural heritage.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group 6 (AG6)

The Alpine Region has outstanding natural and cultural resources. The ways in which these resources have been transformed into economic assets have varied through history and had distinctive effects both on the Alpine environment and on the resources itself. There are various conflicts of interest between the elements to protect natural resources and their economic use. The overall mission of Action Group 6 is to preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources in the Alpine Region. AG6 aims to provide valuable contributions to an Alpine strategic framework that allows the establishment of sustainable and balanced models of resource management and production. Thus, Action Group 6 aims at preserving and sustainably valorising the Alpine natural and cultural heritage to also enable future generations to enjoy the unique living space of the Alps. Therefore, the motto of EUSALP AG6 remains *“With Alpine heritage today for a sustainable, resilient and innovative tomorrow”*.

2. Composition and sub-groups

Action Group 6 is co-led by the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and the Region of Carinthia in Austria. The members of AG6 come from national and regional administrations, municipality associations, NGOs and research institutions from Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, and Switzerland. These members contribute with their various thematic expertise to the work of AG6. Additional members are very welcome to increase the expertise within and the representativeness of AG6.

AG6 will apply a flexible mode of operation without defining fixed sub-groups responsible for implementing specific parts of the work plan. For the single activities AG6 members commit themselves to work together as coordinating members or supporting members.

AG6 applies the core set of the rules of procedure for the Action Groups as decided by the EUSALP Executive Board. As the other provisions can be adapted in every respect to the individual needs, AG6 adopted the whole set of the rules of procedure and reserved its right to modify the non-compulsory ones, if the need arises. In daily work and as far as a formal voting can be avoided all AG6 members are treated as equals and are called upon to contribute to the activities to the best of their ability. AG6 members and further stakeholders get involved around pre-defined topics of the work plan. Among the AG6 members the greatest possible consensus is sought to achieve the best possible acceptance of the decisions taken. AG6 meetings can be carried out in different formats, including physical, hybrid and virtual meetings, as required.

AG6 will align all activities to its mission and motto. The EUSALP Action Plan serves as a guideline for tackling the challenges of the Alpine Region in the policy areas dealt with by AG6. AG6 strives to identify and generate projects linked to its field of action as defined in this work plan. For this purpose, AG6 capitalizes the results of and coordinate its activities with on-going and planned projects on European, national, and regional levels.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

Relevant stakeholders and experts get involved in the activities of AG6 as appropriate. A continuous flow of information between the AG6 members and the exchange with other relevant EUSALP Action Groups as well as with the other EUSALP governance levels, with the aim to follow a cross sectoral approach, ensures not only transparency but also ownership. These objectives are also served by regular updates of AG6 on current developments in the EUSALP process and on other pertinent Alpine processes and by using synergies with the Thematic Working Bodies of the Alpine Convention relevant for the AG6 topics.

AG6 members in advisory role also include NGOs, umbrella organizations and associations representing a certain group of stakeholders or the civil society. Representatives of the civil society provide substantial contributions to the work of EUSALP AG6 in all its thematic fields. They are welcome to participate in AG6 meetings and their participation is facilitated as far as possible.

In particular AG6 will possibly involve the following stakeholders and target groups:

- Civil society for further exchange, as audience for events and communication, and as possible project partners
- EUSALP Youth Council as AG6 members and participants in ASP projects
- Higher education and research institutions as AG6 members, participants in projects, and possible project partners
- SMEs as audience for events and communication
- Interest groups including NGOs as AG6 members
- Business support organisations as AG6 members
- Alpine Convention Thematic Working Bodies for further exchange and as audience for events and communication
- National, regional and local public authorities as AG6 members and as partners in projects
- Associations as AG6 members and as partners in projects
- Infrastructure and public service providers for further exchange and as audience for events and communication
- International organisation under international law for further exchange and as audience for events and communication
- Others

4. The role of the Youth Council

The Youth Council has become an important voice in developing the activities of all EUSALP Action Groups. A continuous flow of information between the AG6 members and the EUSALP Youth Council has been already established. AG6 collaborates with the EUSALP Youth Council and regularly invites their representatives to AG6 meetings and other events. This exchange also includes bilateral communication with the Youth Council. AG6 is committed to further engage the EUSALP Youth Council in all AG6 activities to take up specific considerations and “young” viewpoints from the younger generation and to ensure their involvement in the decision-making process. AG6 is dedicated to consult the EUSALP Youth Council on initiating projects as well as the implementation of the strategy. Moreover, AG6 actively involves the Youth Council in events organised by AG6 such as Action Group 6 meetings, public conferences, workshops, and further sessions.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

In the period from 2020 to 2022 EUSALP Action Group 6 especially focused its work on the overarching topic “co-operating for landscapes in times of climate change” and carried out a considerable number of corresponding activities. Landscape is a basic component of the natural and cultural heritage and an important part of the quality of life for people in the Alpine Region. Humans have shaped the landscapes of the Alpine Region over centuries with farming and cultural practices as well as place-specific know-how. Developments in agriculture, forestry, industry, spatial planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism as well as in the global economy are in many aspects accelerating the transformation of Alpine landscapes. AG6 has cared about this resource by contributing to a general framework, in which the quality and diversity of Alpine landscapes can be safeguarded and innovated through international cooperation towards protection and sustainable management.

In accordance with the “Protocol on Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development” of the Alpine Convention, the harmonisation of economic interests with the need to protect the environment should be the core aim of planning activities in the Alpine Region. AG6 contributed substantially to the AlpGov2 strategic priority policy area “Spatial planning” also by enabling a regular exchange of information with the Thematic Working Body “Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development” of the Alpine Convention. In this respect, AG6 particularly has supported safeguarding and managing the diversity of natural and rural sites, productive landscapes, traditional practices, cultural heritage, and also urban locations of value. In this connection, the pertinent provisions of the Protocols of the Alpine Convention on mountain farming, mountain forests, nature protection and landscape conservation, on tourism and on soil conservation have provided additional orientation for the activities of AG6.

To strengthen the value of cultural landscapes in times of the ongoing climate crisis and to provide a concrete follow-up to the “EUSALP Political Declaration on Sustainable Land Use and Soil Protection” elaborated in 2018, AG6 commissioned a study on preservation and valorisation of the diversity of Alpine natural and cultural landscapes in times of climate crisis. Apart from that AG6 carried out a mapping of natural and cultural landscapes and organized the successful EUSALP Landscape conference back-to-back with a Road Show Stop on spatial planning focusing on land use conflicts related to renewable energy production at EURAC in Bolzano/Bozen.

Furthermore, AG6 successfully organized the second international conference “Territorial Brands in the Alpine Region” with more than 90 practitioners of the agri-food sector and experts on local development focusing on small scale territorial brands in the Alps. During the pandemic various participants met online to discuss different ways of creating a successful territorial brand and the framework conditions underpinning such processes. Furthermore, the impact of a successful territorial brand on the sustainable development of the corresponding territory was discussed. A transnational approach was adopted to identify best practices and replicable development paths for the safeguarding and commercial valorisation of existing knowhow. It has been a key aim to link the different geographical units of EUSALP to concentrate mountain and rural potentials, assets, and initiatives and to better benefit from urban markets and consumers in particular in the pre-alpine areas. This approach also fosters the emergence of an Alpine identity based on the common cultural values expressed in food heritage, valorising Alpine heritage, and enhancing protection and conservation of the Alpine area.

AG6 also contributed to relaunch the EUSALP Task Force on Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber (TF-MFSUT) coordinated by two AG6 members and involving members of AGs 2, 7, 8 and 9. The activities to implement the mandate of the TF-MFSUT included among other things a statement of the Action Groups involved to the consultation-process for the new “EU Forest Strategy”, the organisation of workshops at the EUSALP Annual Fora and a continued input to the development of the document of the French EUSALP Presidency on “Forests and multifunctionality: nature-based solutions as tools for the resilience of alpine territories”. Moreover, the TF-MFSUT held many workshops and seminars such as “Short Forest-Timber Value Chains in Climate Change and Geo-Political Crises” at the Annual Forum 2022 in Trento and contributed to many projects such as for example the ARPAFII project “REDIAFOR” and the Alpine Space project “ALPTREES”.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

In the period 2023-2025 EUSALP Action Group 6 continues to address a more sustainable environmental framework as well as the need for sustainable development and the preservation of the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Alpine Region. Within this general orientation and based on the current needs of the Alpine Region as well as on the evaluation of the achievements of the previous AG6 Work Plan 2020 - 2022, AG6 members have collectively identified priority topics for 2023 - 2025. In this respect EUSALP Action Group 6 aims to realise its objectives through a series of activities in the following **four main thematic clusters**: water, forestry and agriculture, soil and biodiversity, as well as cultural heritage. The key issues and activities on which AG6 will work in this period are based on these identified thematic clusters.

The key issues and activities of AG6 will most likely include the following:

Water:

- Establish an EUSALP Task-Force Water Transition dealing with a smart and sound management of water resources in times of the ongoing climate crisis (one of the four cross-cutting priorities of EUSALP)
- Water security in EUSALP in a changing environment – water scarcity: Development of a policy brief on Alpine permafrost dependant water resources and of guidelines on the qualitative monitoring of these water resources (coordinated by Edmund Mach Foundation, Italy)
- Sharing of river contract processes as an instrument to implement the European Water Framework Directive and the relevant political-legal framework of the non-EU Member States of the Alpine Region; contribution to three international workshops: one in 2024 and two in 2025 (coordinated by ERSAP, Italy)

Forestry and Agriculture:

- Coordination of and contribution to the activities of the TF-MFSUT (Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber) as the flagship initiative of AG6 (coordinated by Fondazione Edmund Mach and EURAC Research, Italy)
- Contribution to the Forest EcoValue ASP classic project and establish links to forest networks (coordinated by INRAE, France)

- Gathering and exchanging good practices on the recovery and innovation of traditional agricultural techniques and the dynamic management of Alpine biodiversity (including propagation of regional wildflowers, shrubs, and trees) (coordinated by Rete Semi Rurali, Italy)
- Exchange on transhumance and pastoralism in the EUSALP Region (coordinated by AG6 Lead)

Soil and Biodiversity:

- Land recycling and unsealing in the Alpine region: unsealing of sealed surfaces by using sealed/built/developed areas, awareness-raising event with political debates on land use/protection with involvement of citizens (coordinated by AG6 Lead and supported by Lower Austria, Austria and Plattform Land, Italy)
- Contribution to the international workshop of the Life project "IP GESTIRE 2020" in October 2023 to share its results in the framework of EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030 and to also consider the relevant political-legal framework of the non-EU Member States of the Alpine Region in this respect (coordinated by ERSAP, Italy)

Cultural Heritage:

- Contribution to the ASP classic project AlpTextyles (coordinated by Polo Poschiavo, Switzerland)
- Continuation of exploration of feasibility of GIAHS (Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems) in the EUSALP area (coordinated by Polo Poschiavo, Switzerland)
- Supporting the UNESCO Inscription of Alpine Food Heritage in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices for Intangible Cultural Heritage (coordinated by Regione Lombardia, Italy)
- AG6 public events, such as the Second EUSALP Landscape Conference in 2024 to showcase the work of the AG6 members for example on the topic of soil

All activities and their timing outlined in this work program are subject to possible changes.

The following options for financing the activities might be available:

For events, conferences, meetings, workshops, networking activities:

Support EUSALP project within the limits of the budget (incubator function), sponsoring by AG6 members or others, synergies with existing already financed events by AG6 members or others, synergies with already financed projects, such as AlpTextyles (Alpine Space) as well as IP GESTIRE 2020 (LIFE) or Rock-me (Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino)

During the implementation of this work plan, AG6 will continue its embedding efforts and also explore the use of other funding sources such as INTERREG cross-border cooperation programmes but also programmes managed directly by the EC and regional or national funds.

2. Strategic flagship initiative

For the period 2023-2025 AG6 has identified the flagship initiative to further coordinate and enhance the contribution to the activities of the EUSALP Task Force on Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber (TF-MFSUT). The EUSALP Task Force on Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber plans to further involve members of EUSALP AG2, AG7, AG8 and AG9 with a focus on climate change impacts on forests and along its different value chains.

One of the main issues addressed by the TF-MFSUT are the governance mechanisms that would allow to increase the resilience of mountain forests, in particular regarding the impacts of climate change. With the establishment of the TF-MFSUT in 2019, an integrated and cross-sectorial perspective has been initiated enabling future-oriented and innovative approaches for the timber and non-timber forest value chains. Its objective is to raise awareness and manage conflicts of interest in the context of the multifunctionality of EUSALP forests. Beyond conflicting issues, the idea is to create a bridge between the different thematic approaches and to identify the common denominator(s) capable of meeting shared challenges and coordinated actions in favour of greater territorial resilience in the broadest sense. The TF-MFSUT builds on the implemented REDIAFOR project to meet these objectives and aims to further contribute to the “EU Forest Strategy”.

Furthermore, the TF-MFSUT continues to promote the implementation of nature-based solutions as an effective way to address challenges of preserving biodiversity, protecting against natural hazards, and maintaining the multifunctionality of EUSALP forests. For instance, nature-based solutions can be used to promote the renewable material wood capable of replacing artificial raw materials or fossil energy sources, whereby further emissions of greenhouse gas could be captured and reduced. In this perspective, multifunctional forests, as nature-based solutions, are further explored as a tool for territorial resilience to be promoted and combined with existing technical solutions.

The aim is to ensure a smooth information exchange on the forest-based sector among the concerned Action Groups through regional, national, and international meetings within the EUSALP area to tackle conflicts as well as to support joint interests. Moreover, the TF-MFSUT will strengthen the communication among forest owners and administrations and organisations, timber clusters and associated service providers (such as IT, planners, architectures, retailers, engineers, etc.), youth organisations, training and education institutions and NGOs.

The findings and results might be capitalised on the political level. Apart from that, the findings of its activities will be published on the TF-MFSUT LinkedIn profile and on the forthcoming standalone website for the TF within the EUSALP webpage to ensure the visibility of the work carried out. In addition, the TF-MFSUT will involve the Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry Working Body of the Alpine Convention (MAMF) and will involve the results originated by ongoing projects on ecosystem services linked to the forest-based sector and funded by regional, national and EU programmes.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

For the period 2023-2025 the Action Groups proposed to establish an **EUSALP Task Force on the topic of water transition** to secure and preserve water resources in scarcity times as a cross-cutting priority of EUSALP. This proposal fits one of the four defined cross-cutting priorities which is to promote a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water.

The overall goal of the TF “Water Transition” is to enhance the transition to an EUSALP water smart society guided by an anticipatory vision of front-running value chain actors and stakeholders of civil society for a sound management of water resources. Also, the TF will favour the exchange, knowledge, and experience among concerned AGs to tackle conflicts, support joint interests and capitalize results on the political level. With their activities the single Action Groups will address the following objectives:

- **RESEARCH:** AG1 aims at elaborating a transition process to cope with the effects of climate change in ski territories (TranStat project) as well as to develop a portfolio of nature-based solutions for mountain areas (MountResilience project).
- **CIRCULARITY:** AG2 will focus on supporting water management projects funded by the European programmes 21-27.
- **CONNECTIVITY:** AG5 aims at contributing to the digitisation in the field of water management through exchange of ideas and good practices

- **QUALITY:** AG6 will bring in its expertise by coordinating the TF with the aim of enhancing the exchange on water management. In addition, AG6 will focus on sharing river contact processes, water scarcity and traditional agricultural techniques.
- **BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE:** AG7 aims at highlighting the interconnection of green and blue infrastructures, investigating, and understanding the carrying capacity of Green Infrastructure as well as the management of river corridors and the link with nature restoration law and peatlands.
- **WATER EXTREMES:** AG8 will contribute with indicators, scientific results and policy recommendations to the topic of weather extremes, which includes water scarcity, droughts, and heavy precipitation events to improve the management of these extreme events. In the field of natural hazard and risk management, the topic nature-based solutions is frequently discussed and has already been part of previous AG8 activities. As the development of a portfolio for nature-based solutions is planned, AG8 aims to support this process with its knowledge and experience.
- **EUSALP YOUTH COUNCIL** aims at bringing in the perspective of young people in order to improve resilience of cities, agriculture and industry.

Each Action Group will support and contribute to the Task Force “Water Transition” in their respective field of experience and will participate in the exchange of knowledge and best practices. For each Action Group one or more coordinators will be assigned to assure the implementation of the single activities within the respective Action Groups and fulfilment of the requested contributions. In the period 2023-2025 the EUSALP Task Force on “Water Transition” will organise at least three exchange meetings.

Apart from the EUSALP Task Force on the topic of water transition AG6 will also participate in the **cross-cutting priority on circular economy**. Circular economy offers specific opportunities for rural and mountainous regions with their sustainable valorisation, their complementarity as well as the exploration of the new opportunities. Additionally, regional material cycle solutions are particularly appropriate for mountainous areas. Circular economy is a horizontal economic principle to be addressed by multiple working groups in EUSALP and is a unique opportunity to create joint innovative actions, extend value chains, new supporting instruments such as tools, cross-border financial instruments and new projects in support of sustainable use of limited Alpine resources (water, wood, metals) and support to accelerated use of clean and green energy. In this regard AG6 will use the synergies with the Alpine Space classic project AlpTextyles, the ARPAF-III project “Made in the Alps” and the EUSALP Territorial Branding.

In the framework of the cross-cutting priority on circular economy, AG6 aims at the following objectives:

- Raising awareness of territorial branding to ensure diffusion of circular approaches among SMEs in the Alpine regions (topics for the 2023 and 2025 EUSALP territorial branding conferences)
- Promoting circularity in the Alpine textile value chains (valorisation of local resources, such as wool, linen, hemp, dyeing plants)
- Integrating knowledge on consumers and their desire for sustainable lifestyles and purchases in the policy debate on circularity
- Educating about the links between circular economy and safeguarding cultural heritage (e.g., Thriftiness and creative uses of all available local resources have long characterized Alpine population); exploring possible links to UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage lists or to GIAHS: Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems)
- Stimulating responsible use of waters and woods

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

AG6 conducts regular communication work on its activities and results through the EUSALP, Alpine Convention and Region of Carinthia media channels. Communication at EUSALP level is regularly coordinated with the EUSALP communication officer of the TSS and the communication officer of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention.

2. Events

Within the Work Plan 2023-2025 AG6 plans to carry out at least one public conference, such as the AG6 Landscape Conference 2024 and/or the AG6 Territorial Brands Conference 2023, in order to disseminate the results of the activities carried out by AG6. These events also offer a platform for interaction with the wider public, stakeholders, the press, and political authorities.

Furthermore, AG6 organises workshops, exchange meetings or conferences on the core topics of AG6 (water, forests, agriculture, biodiversity, [soil] and cultural heritage). Apart from that, EUSALP AG6 is also committed to organise virtual cross-cutting meetings and to foster cross-MRS cooperation.

Internally, AG6 organises a minimum of two Action Group meetings per year. Such meetings allow the group members to ensure effective cooperation, to drive the implementation of the Work Plan forward, to update each other on their ongoing activities, and to deliberate about relevant issues. Non-members and further experts are usually also welcome to join these meetings, in accordance with the agenda of the meetings.

WORK PLAN OUTPUT AND RESULTS

The main activities of AG6 are the ones described above. The main outputs of these activities will most likely include for example:

- 2nd Landscape Conference in 2024
- 3rd Territorial Brands Conference in 2023
- Policy recommendations on potentials and challenges of "Current issues of Alpine water management"
- Exchange workshops on topics of AG6 for example on river contract processes or on multifunctional forests and sustainable use of timber
- Other outputs capitalising the key AG6 activities

Possible Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	0
please describe if possible	
n. cross-border/transnational events	2
please describe if possible: 2 nd Landscape Conference in 2024, 3 rd Territorial Brands Conference in 2023,	
n. joint policy recommendations	1
please describe if possible: Policy recommendations on potentials and challenges of "current issues of Alpine water management"	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group 6)	1
please describe if possible: possibly on land use/recycling and renewable energy or another core topic of AG6	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group 6)	0

please describe if possible	
n. of papers / research works to be published	0
please describe if possible	
budget to be raised with European funding	0
please describe if possible	
other:	2
please describe if possible: for example: exchange workshops on specific topics, activities of the Task Force on Water Transition	



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