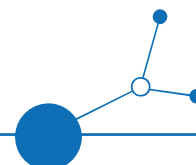


# Action Plan for future Alpine Pearls EGTC

Deliverable 1.4.3



Version 1  
03 2024





## Index

<b>1. Action Plan for future Alpine Pearls EGTC</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>3. Correspondence with strategic documents and initiatives</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Goal and Objectives</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>5. Stakeholders</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>6. Actions</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.Optimization of the EGTC as organization .....	6
1.a - EGTC Governance .....	6
Measure 1.a.1: Strategic Meetings .....	6
Measure 1.a.2: Concepts for the optimization of the EGTC structure .....	7
1.b Financing .....	7
Measure 1.b.1: Definition of possible financing sources for the EGTC .....	7
Measure 1.b.2: Implementing the identified financing sources for the EGTC.....	8
1.c - Internationalization .....	8
Measure 1.c.1: Make the EGTC Alpine Pearls known at regional, national and international (EU) level.....	8
Measure 1.c.2: Active role in the European cross border platform and networking with other EGTCs.....	8
1.d - Project pipeline .....	9
Measure 1.d.1: Optimize the “integration” of members into ongoing projects .....	10
Measure 1.d.2: Strategic actions drafting and prioritization (clusters of Pearls).....	10
Measure 1.d.3: Matching project drafts with the most suitable funding sources.....	12
2. Optimization of the added value of being Alpine Pearls members .....	12
2.a. Capacity building activities and support to the members .....	12
Measure 2.a.1: Platform for exchange between members.....	13
Measure 2.a.2: Academy.....	13
Measure 2.a.3: Support in the development and implementation of local action plans.....	13
2.b. Working groups for the development and implementation of local action plans. ....	14
Measure 2.b.1: Local core teams .....	14
Measure 2.b.2: Dynamic development and implementation of local action plans .....	15
<b>7. Timeline</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>8. Resources</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>9. Responsibilities</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>10. Monitoring and Evaluation</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>11. Risks and Contingencies</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>12. Review and Adjustment</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>13. Communication Plan</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>14. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>15. Approvals</b> .....	<b>19</b>



# 1. Action Plan for future Alpine Pearls EGTC

## 2. Introduction

The Alps and Carpathians are important natural corridors that connect many central European countries. Unfortunately, cooperation across borders often lacks a joint vision in mountain areas. To change this, the Central Mountains project designs and implements a joint strategy and regional action plans to create cross-border functional areas. By improving governance structures, processes and operations, the partners sustainably improve cooperation among Alpine-Carpathian regions. Alpine Pearls was founded in 2006 by 17 member destinations, the “Pearls of the Alps”. This resulted from two EU projects, Alps Mobility and Alps Mobility II. Both of these projects grew from an initiative of the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment, and Water Management. The focus was on creating innovative, sustainable, and climate-friendly tourism packages.

The results of these EU projects are now implemented by the transnational, Alps-wide umbrella organisation Alpine Pearls. Over the years, new members were added, all of which support eco-tourism, climate protection, and sustainable holidays. Today, 18 Pearls in four Alpine countries are members of the Alpine Pearls European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC for short). The EGTC was founded in 2022. This form of coalition of the member municipalities promotes and facilitates cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation between the individual members. The goal is to make projects smoother and more efficient and create a forum for the exchange of knowledge that benefits all of the municipalities involved.

Today, Alpine Pearls is a coalition of 18 municipalities/destinations in the Alps, which have set themselves the goal of promoting and introducing environmentally friendly mobility. That means avoiding the use of private vehicles as far as possible by offering a full mobility guarantee for guests at the destination and promoting traffic-calmed areas with excellent conditions for pedestrians. All member destinations are dedicated to sustainable mobility.





Four out of seven countries of the Alpine Region (Austria, Italy, Germany, and Slovenia) are part of the EGTC today. Nevertheless, the EGTC aims at enlarging its focus and developing in Switzerland, France and, eventually, in Liechtenstein.

The main territorial challenge addressed by the "Central Mountains" project is the lack of effective cross-border and transnational cooperation in mountain areas. This cooperation is crucial, since it is the basis for the proper management of natural resources, steering the sustainable development of the whole chain of mountain areas and ensuring that the local communities are involved in the process (incl. youth involvement).

In the Alps there is a long tradition of cooperation. A high diversity of structures is already operating in the area with a wide variety of governance systems. The Alps take advantage of the macroregional EU Strategy for the Alpine region (EUSALP), which is supported financially by the EU, and also, they have a specific Interreg Alpine Space programme that finances cooperation projects across the borders of 7 Alpine countries. Even though, Alpine regions are still very heterogeneous with economic and demographic disparities. There is a need for functional cooperation between regions and municipalities to better respond to current challenges.

The Alpine EGTC is already a solution to these problems, seeking a transnational solution of governance, but it lives within itself the challenges caused by the enormous heterogeneity of the territories it encompasses: its Pearls range from Chamois to Bad Reichenhall, all inevitably different from each other, to which are added different national, administrative and political contexts where, for example, the issue of eco-mobility is placed at different stages of the policy-cycle.

There is a need to focus on "functional" areas, strengthen territorial cohesion across borders, establish effective cross-border governance structures based on integrated strategies and unified resources. Also, intersectoral cooperation should be enhanced (public/private/non-governmental entities).

The Alps and the Carpathians are part of a bigger mountain system. Mountains don't respect borders, as they are shared by many European countries. They claim specific needs and challenges that cannot be efficiently solved by acting alone on a national/regional/local level. This means looking beyond administrative boundaries to consider 'functional' areas and to better understand the links between different types of territories.

Neighbouring regions often face similar challenges because of the same geographical location. It is therefore crucial that stakeholders from these cross-border areas learn from each other and exchange their knowledge and good practices through cooperation between border entities.

The approach designed by Central Mountain is innovative as it relies on capitalisation, joint strategies, cross-border cooperation to support the creation and operation of "functional areas", not defined by administrative borders, but by cross-border functional linkages resulting from common and/or integrating spatial and socio-economic features.

The local context of the Alpine Pearls well represents the need to strengthen cooperation between mountain areas and, as emerged during Workshop with Alpine stakeholders held in Primiero San Martino di Castrozza (Italy) on October 14th 2023 (D.1.3.4) on the basis of a self-assessment process of the participating Pearls, the level of development and thus the starting point from which the area moves, differs between countries but also within the same national context. This opens up the possibility of two different types of cooperation: (cooperation between areas with a different status quo situation on the same topic) and horizontal approach (cooperation between similar status quo situations on specific topics).

In this process the involvement of beneficiaries and stakeholders is crucial. For the EGTC Alpine Pearls they include local authorities (member municipalities) and local tourism organisations, regional and national authorities (responsible for EGTCs, for ex. Länder in Austria, Ministries in Italy, etc.), interest groups (regional tourism organisations), EGTCs (networking with other EGTCs, EGTC platform, etc.). providers of



mobility services as railways etc (sustainable mobility as main focus of the EGTC), possible partners (SMEs and private companies).

### 3. Correspondence with strategic documents and initiatives

This Action Plan is coherent with the Alpine-Carpathian joint strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe, as it relies on this document to be fully replicable and comparable with the other Action Plans.

It is in line with the Alpine Convention, by which the protocol on spatial planning and sustainable development aims at more concrete action planning, making it less formal, and that can be adapted/updated.

It is in line with the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region Strategy as governance is a cross-cutting policy area in the EUSAR, including institutional capacity. Lack of effective cross-border coordination in the EUSAR has been identified in the strategy as one of the main bottlenecks and challenges in the strategy implementation. The Action Plan, through the enhancement of the Alpine Pearls EGTC will contribute to the strengthening of a multilevel governance.

In this perspective, the Action Plan is also aligned with the Territorial Agenda 2030 Strategy explicitly mentioning EGTC as an example of recommended approaches in territorial cooperation.

The Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism also intercepts one of the historical topics the Alpine Pearls work on, which is sustainable mobility in tourist alpine destinations as a key to sustainable development.

And, finally, the Action Plan, by involving stakeholders and beneficiaries, corresponds with the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development (especially SDG 15 and 17), by improving public participation as an important means of achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

### 4. Goal and Objectives

This Action Plan contributes to *“strengthening and improving governance models in the Alpine-Carpathian mountain areas of Central Europe, with a particular focus on cross-border and transnational structures for cooperation for solving joint challenges in sustainable development of mountain regions”*.

In particular, the general objective of this Action Plan is the **development of the EGTC Alpine Pearls as the platform for transnational cooperation between tourism destinations in the Alpine region (focus on sustainability and mobility)**.

This goal supports the development of a new governance structure for this European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation to achieve social, economic and ecologic sustainability, professionalisation of the participating network and improving mobility solutions for visitors and inhabitants.

Two specific objectives will contribute to this general aim:

- 1) Optimization of the EGTC as an organization (governance, financing, internationalization, project pipeline), leading to 1 renewed governance structure of the Alpine Pearls EGTC supported by strategic documents for improved governance, future EGTC financing and developing the project pipeline to be conducted by the future EGTC.



- 2) Optimization of the added value of membership: capacity building activities and support (EGTC tasks), active working groups for development and implementation of local action plans towards sustainability (tasks at local level). Topics on which the activities will focus are:
- Sustainable mobility (core topic) for tourists and inhabitants
  - Protection and care of the natural ecosystem (biodiversity)
  - Development and protection of a place to have a feeling of well-being (social sustainability)
  - Circular, responsible, and local economy
  - Maintaining and improving environmental quality (energy efficiency)

These two objectives will be reached by defining a pilot action (D.2.2.2) for enhancing participatory governance within Alpine Pearls EGTC and action plans preparation of individual member municipalities, including capacity building and exchange of experience activities, organised at transnational and cross-border levels. Thus, contributing to testing transnational cooperation in Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs).

Results will be included in 1 final report prepared by Alpine Pearls.

## 5. Stakeholders

Actually, a large number of stakeholders is constantly involved in the project, due to the structure of the EGTC Alpine Pearls, as foreseen in the Statute and Convention of the EGTC.

In fact the Board is composed of 6 members (The President, 5 Deputies) expression of the local authorities and tourism sector, with political role.

Whereas the General Assembly, reuniting twice a year, represents all associates of the EGTC (with a political role), and supportive partners (with a consulting role) and is the major body for ruling the activities of the Alpine Pearls. All in all, it counts for 18 members.

At the beginning of the project, two main stakeholders were nominated: the tourism director of Weissensee (where the EGTC has its seat) Thomas Michor and the Tourism director of Primiero San Martino di Castrozza (to have a balance between Italian-speaking and German-speaking members). Later, also the Local Action Groups director of Hermagor (Friedrich Veider) as an expert in functional areas (Heuopen) and the representatives of the EGTC Euregiosenzaconfini were nominated as relevant stakeholders.

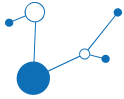
Within this context, municipalities and Tourism organisations will be the main beneficiaries of the action plan implementation and they will be directly involved in its development, together with Regional Authorities (Land Carinthia, but also all other alpine regions). All of them and the network of other EGTCs will be constantly informed on how the action plan progresses.

Results will be made available to all relevant stakeholders, from the level of the member municipalities to National Authorities and EU bodies, such as the Committee of Regions.

## 6. Actions

In line with the outlined specific objective, two levels of action have been identified:

- Optimization of the EGTC as an organization
- Optimization of the added value of membership



## 1. Optimization of the EGTC as an organization

### 1. a - EGTC Governance

At the moment, the roles of the bodies of the Alpine Pearls ETGC are defined by the Statute:

**General Assembly:** It is the main body of the EGTC and has power over the approval of the budget (both final and provisional). It decides on the strategic guidelines and the annual marketing plan, approves the work of the Board, organises the Management and decides on the rules for the recruitment of collaborators. The General Assembly also approves the membership, supports partners and criteria for the admission of new candidates.

**Executive Board:** it is elected by the General Assembly, and it operationally directs the tasks of the EGTC. It reports on the budget of the previous year and proposes the budget forecast. It may also appoint qualified committees on specific issues, which are responsible for the examination of the subject matter, identify new tasks and provide new input for the future development of the EGTC.

**President:** he/she represents the EGTC externally and assumes also the role of **Director** acting on behalf of the EGTC itself. The President convenes the Assembly of Members and the Board, chairs its meetings and prepares, together with the management coordinator, legally binding contracts and agreements for the EGTC.

**Management:** The Management is responsible for the implementation of the EGTC's activities, is led by a coordinator and can only act within the framework of deliberations. Management formalises contracts and deals with the EGTC's management activities, defining its strategic guidelines and preparing its annual plan of measures and the projects and resources needed for their implementation: it is responsible for monitoring and identifying the funds needed to implement the above-mentioned projects. It draws up the annual accounts and ensures the preparation of the budget. Since May 2022 the EGTC has assigned for 3 years the management task to the Brandnamic agency of Bressanone, which also deals with the EGTC's tourism promotion activities. The staff of the EGTC (now 2 staff members, a third one will be contracted soon) deals with European projects.

**Board of Auditors:** whose task is the audit for each financial year of the EGTC's financial management concerning the regularity of the accounts and the conformity of the use of funds with the statute.

The goals of this line of action are to increase the efficiency of internal decisional processes and optimize the EGTC structure, for which the following measures are foreseen.

#### Measure 1.a.1: Strategic Meetings

During project months M14, M16, M18, M20, M22, M24, M26, M28, 8 (approx. 1 every 2 months) strategic online meetings are going to be organised to define concrete strategies and measures to be implemented for the development of the EGTC. The main topic for each meeting will be defined through consultations between the director, management, and main stakeholders at the local level.

Possible topics addressed during the strategic meetings are:

- Membership enlargement in regions/countries where the EGTC does not have members, in order to cover the whole alpine region (further Internationalization of the EGTC).
- Definition of further cooperation forms besides full membership ("associate" partners, learning Pearls, teaching Pearls, etc.).
- Development of cooperation with strategic partners (for ex. Energy or mobility providers)



- Pro-active interaction with relevant institutions (for ex. Regional councils, Ministries, EU institutions, European Cross Border Platform, Alpine Convention, etc.)
- Definition of clear boundaries between institutional activities (EU projects, etc.) and marketing activities, deriving also from consultations foreseen from M14 to M18 in Measure 1.1.2 “Concepts for the optimisation of the EGTC structure”.
- Research for the best solution to guarantee an interactive vertical approach between members, regional/national level and EGTC management (consultations with other organizations operating in more countries, for ex. CIPRA)

The results of each meeting will be discussed/presented in the Board meetings (M15, M17, M19, M21, M23, M25, M27, M29) and the main outputs will be communicated to the Alpine Pearls members.

### Measure 1.a.2: Concepts for the optimization of the EGTC structure

From M14 to M18 Interviews and consultations with institutions, international organizations, managing authorities of EU-financing programs and experts of European networks will be conducted to discuss about the challenges of the actual EGTC structure and to collect ideas about how to improve it.

From M19 to M20 possible improved structure scenarios for the EGTC will be outlined (maximum 3) and presented to the Alpine Pearls members.

From M20 to M24 the most efficient scenario will be selected through consultations with members and stakeholders, to define the next steps for its implementation starting from M25 (e.g. new elections, call for management).

## 1. b Financing

At the moment the EGTC finances its activities through membership fees. Further incomes (from marketing activities) are very marginal (less than 2-3% of the budget). The largest share of the budget (approx. 75%) is needed to cover management costs. Pre-financing and co-financing for EU-projects are therefore quite challenging.

Given this premise, the objective of this line of action is to generate synergies through the optimization of the EGTC structure (see also 1.a.2) and guarantee further financing sources to the EGTC to enable it to develop long-term plans and to intensify participation in European projects.

### Measure 1.b.1: Definition of possible financing sources for the EGTC

From M14 to M20 activities are dedicated to the collection of inputs from consultations with institutions and stakeholders at local, regional, national and European levels, concerning the following possible financing sources:

- New members who can bring additional resources through membership fees.
- Cooperation partners (e.g. transport service providers).
- Public financing (regions, ministries, etc.).
- Private financing/sponsorships (foundations, private companies, etc.).
- EU-funding and national funding opportunities (Project Pipeline - Action 1.d)
- Further innovative ideas (e.g. crowdfunding, fundraising, etc.)





- One of the issues to be addressed among the possible sources of EGTC funding is also the possibility of expanding economic activity related to territorial marketing, without seeing it as opposed to 'institutional' activity. To do this, it will be necessary to deepen the legal and fiscal aspects connected to the EGTC's legal form itself and to strengthen the image of the Alpine Pearls as excellence in sustainable mobility and Alpine tourist destinations thanks to its transnational perspective.

From the consultation and the desk research a matrix will be defined showing the main activities, tasks, and projects that the EGTC needs/wishes to implement crossed with possible funding resources. This will be enriched with the output of the Project Pipeline (Action 1.d).

### Measure 1.b.2: Implementing the identified financing sources for the EGTC

Once all possible sources have been identified, from M21 to M24 concrete actions and tasks (who does what, included timeline) will be defined for at least three of the above-mentioned financing options.

From that moment (i.e. from M24 until project closure and beyond) the aim is to implement the planned activities/projects and set up a continuous cooperation with possible financing entities.

## 1.c - Internationalization

The EGTC Alpine Pearls was founded in 2022 with the aim of providing an already existing network of Municipalities (since 2006 as an association under Austrian law) with a more effective instrument to foster transnational cooperation and access European funding, both as an organization and at the local level through individual municipalities or a group of them.

In these two years of activity, it has been realised that some further steps need to be taken for the EGTC to be recognised as a transnational/international organisation, overcoming the national logic whereby it is subject to Austrian legislation, as it is based in this country.

The main goal for this line of action is thus to strengthen the role of the EGTC Alpine Pearls as a reference network for cross-border cooperation in the Alps on the topics of sustainable tourism and environmentally friendly mobility, through the following measures.

### Measure 1.c.1: Make the EGTC Alpine Pearls known at regional, national and international (EU) levels.

From M14 to M20 the main task will be to activate contact with regional and national authorities (of territories with member municipalities) to make them aware of the Alpine Pearls EGTC existence, added value and the challenges it has to face, as well as of the activities to be carried out to overcome them.

To implement this task following activities are going to be implemented:

- Organization of online and face-to-face meetings to assess the type of support that these bodies can provide to the EGTC (involvement of member municipalities in the talks, depending on the territory).
- Invitation to participate in EGTC public events organised by Members or other project-related events.

From M21 a "to-do list - how to work better together" will be defined involving at least 3 regional/national authorities with tasks that will be implemented until the end of the project and beyond. The participation of relevant representatives of regional and national authorities in at least one EGTC Alpine Pearls event is foreseen before the end of the project.

### Measure 1.c.2: Active role in the European cross-border platform and networking with other EGTCs



From M14 (until the end of the project and beyond) the Alpine Pearls will actively participate in the activity of the new “European Cross Border Platform”, which includes the previous EGTC Platform.

This action encompasses the participation in selected activities organized by the platform, activation of direct contacts with the Committee of Regions to find adequate solutions to the challenges the EGTC has to face, and application for the organization of events of the platform.

Also local stakeholders will be informed about relevant activities and invited to selected events.

From M14 to M18 The Alpine Pearls will establish proactive contact with other EGTCs working on similar topics or territorially relevant for the EGTC Alpine Pearls.

From M19 (until project end and beyond) working tables and codified exchanges will be established with at least 3 other EGTCs (e.g. quarterly). The selection of EGTCs and the exchanges will be based on the identification of common topics on which to work together (mutual support), e.g. in the preparation of European projects or the organisation of events or initiatives (awards, etc.).

## 1.d - Project Pipeline

The possibility to access European funding more effectively (both for the EGTC as an organization and for its members) was one of the main motivations for the transformation of the network from an Austrian association to an EGTC (access to a larger number of programmes, possibility to submit projects also as a single partner, ambitions to access ITI funds, etc.).

In these first two years of activity, however, it was realised that the theoretical possibilities of access to European funding sometimes clash with bureaucratic impediments within individual funding programmes or with a lack of knowledge of the EGTC instrument and its potential/possibilities on the part of the managing authorities of individual programmes, controlling bodies, etc.

On the one hand the status of EGTC has made the Alpine Pearls network much more attractive as a partner to be integrated into project consortia (the number of applications to be included in European projects has more than tripled compared to the past, 5 of them are currently running - <https://www.alpine-pearls.com/en/egtc/projects>), on the other hand, the EGTC has repeatedly encountered constraints in terms of eligibility of costs in some funding programmes (the EGTC is actually considered as an Austrian partner and therefore not eligible in programmes where Austria is not eligible) and bureaucratic obstacles in the implementation of projects (from the choice of pilot regions to the rules for hiring staff, etc.).

This situation caused some discontent in particular for those partner municipalities located in regions outside funding programmes that the EGTC can access as Austrian partner. This calls for urgent solutions to overcome these obstacles and make the EGTC fully capable of exploiting its potential as an instrument for more effective transnational (and not only cross-border) cooperation.

Moreover, as the results of the stakeholder workshop conducted in October 2023 in Primiero San Martino di Castrozza, with the support of the two project partners ISIG and EURAC, have shown, the heterogeneity among the various member municipalities - first and foremost with regard to the network's main focus, i.e. sustainable mobility - makes it quite challenging to develop a single project idea on which to involve all members.

Although this remains an objective of the EGTC (i.e. to develop project ideas on a common theme, which can then be implemented in different ways in the individual localities, both in terms of content and resources with which to finance it), it is evident that in addition to European or national funding, an economic commitment at the local and regional level is also necessary.

The above-mentioned workshop and the subsequent bilateral discussions with the members indicate the need to create clusters of Pearls with a certain homogeneity within the EGTC, in order to develop



specific projects already in the short-medium term on the theme of sustainable mobility and on the other 4 fields of action defined in the Alpine Pearls strategy approved when the EGTC was founded:

- Protection and care of the natural ecosystem (biodiversity)
- Development and protection of a place to have a feeling of well-being (social sustainability)
- Circular, responsible, and local economy
- Maintaining and improving environmental quality (energy efficiency)

Given this premise, the main goal for this line of action is to overcome the above-described challenges and develop a financing (see also 1.b) and project pipeline plan based on the needs of local communities.

To reach this goal the following measures have been identified.

#### Measure 1.d.1: Optimize the “integration” of members into ongoing projects

From M13 (until project closure and beyond) the focus will be on the integration of all EGTC partners in the activities of ongoing projects, beyond what is foreseen in the project application forms. In fact, the member municipalities of the EGTC Alpine Pearls had, and still have, high expectations of the EGTC as a means to effectively access European funding, to accelerate the implementation of projects related to the topic of sustainable tourism and environmentally friendly mobility. In current projects, only certain localities can be directly involved in them (e.g. as pilot regions or as event venues). Thus, in order to foster the spirit of transnational sharing and cooperation an integration process is needed, including the following activities:

- constant information on the activities carried out in individual projects (through monthly reports to the members, bilateral discussions and within the framework of the Members' Meetings or project-related events)
- give visibility within the projects (and beyond - e.g. through communication activities) to the best practices already implemented or under development in the Member Municipalities
- offer to member municipalities through the projects (regardless of their territorial eligibility within the projects) a platform to gather inputs, ideas and an important network of contacts to deal with specific issues: e.g. tourism strategies to cope with climate change - e.g. Beyond Snow project - or know-how and concepts for the development of renewable energy communities - e.g. DECA project.
- involve relevant stakeholders in project activities according to their respective topics of interest.

In M27 a short report about the integration activities of EGTC members in ongoing projects will be delivered and it will include, based on the experiences gathered, a short vademecum on how to further improve the involvement of members in the EGTC's European project activities.

#### Measure 1.d.2: Strategic actions drafting and prioritization (clusters of Pearls)

From M14 to M24 the EGTC will work on the definition of common project ideas in particular on three aspects: digitalization, last mile and visitor flow management. These projects are to be understood as framework projects for the EGTC, which in some way also aim to generate an unmistakable Unique Selling Proposition (USP) for Alpine Pearls. The financing of these projects will have to take place on several levels: on the one hand, funding programmes will obviously be sought (see 1.d.3.) that can be accessed as an EGTC or in which individual members can be involved, but on the other hand, the commitment of each member



municipality will also be crucial in finding national and regional sources of financing, to be flanked by the necessary investments at the local level.

A framework project idea will be developed by M24 on at least one of the three indicated sub-themes, structured in common objectives to be achieved to strengthen the Alpine Pearls USP.

Furthermore, during the workshop held in Primiero San Martino di Castrozza in October 2023, around 50 participants representing 17 Municipalities, 3 project partners, 1 Natural Park and 1 Tourism Promotion Agency, 6 strategic actions were outlined and they were chosen in terms of priority in the following order:

- 1) Change for climate: exploit the opportunities for deseasonalisation.
- 2) Alpine steps: new synergies and strategies for mobility and mountain valorisation.
- 3) Reactive children: advantages and opportunities for local children.
- 4) Living in a Pearl: attracting long-term newcomers.
- 5) Paths of potential financing to transform proposals into real change.
- 6) PearlToPearl: disseminate experience to advance together.

According to this preference list, the Pearls have been invited to self-assess their current situation in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and from this self-assessed SWOT analysis a set of indicators have been set:

- Deseasonalisation, calculating the ratio between the usually "low peak" options and the usually "high peak" options.
- Touristic pressure, investigating how touristic flows affect the local population as an average among the four investigated areas (mobility, accessibility, prices, other).
- Sustainable mobility, the indicator takes into consideration the ratio between all the sustainable mobility options (walking, cycling, public transport, shared transport) and the "Private car" option.
- Mobility innovation, considering the results on the options related to the level of development of on-demand and sharing/multi-modal mobility solutions.

The result of this investigation shows a heterogeneous state of the art which calls for different typologies of integrations among Pearls:

- horizontal, involving Pearls who have similar strategic priorities and a similar baseline, in terms of development and innovation.
- vertical, involving Pearls with different starting points with the aim of "upskilling" on a specific strategic line towards the best level of achievement.

Starting from this analysis, from M13 to M18 the results of the above-mentioned workshop will be complemented by the analysis of the roadmaps of each Member Municipality, to obtain an even more reliable overall picture of the status quo of each locality on mobility and sustainable tourism issues.

Through consultations with key stakeholders of the member localities (online, bilateral and at events), priorities for action will be defined concerning the proposed action drafts.

From M19 to M24, taking into account the results of the above-mentioned consultations, to make more effective cross-border cooperation for the development of projects on specific topics identified among the fields of action defined by the EGTC, the member localities will be invited to work together in clusters formed taking into account both the strategic priorities and their respective level of development.

Until M24 at least one workshop for each cluster will be organised. Further cooperation activities for the preparation of projects, up to the end of the CM project and beyond, might differ between the different clusters and cannot be defined in advance at this stage.



### Measure 1.d.3: Matching project drafts with the most suitable funding sources

The philosophy behind the work of the EGTC Alpine Pearls is to develop innovative and forward-looking project ideas on eco-friendly mobility and sustainable tourism. In the various opportunities (both online and in-person) that the EGTC platform offers to work together in the creation of project concepts, it is important that the representatives of each Pearl, while being aware of the limits and potential of their own territory, know how to define ambitious objectives, even if they are not always immediately feasible. It is first and foremost a matter of identifying a clear medium- to long-term goal, to be achieved one step at a time. The EGTC's function is to provide support for the realisation of these objectives, through the possibility of cooperating with partners throughout the Alpine arc and to draw, where possible, on sources of funding that will make it possible to initiate or accelerate the implementation of the desired projects.

However, it is important to emphasize the importance of a concrete commitment of the individual EGTC members, in terms of political engagement and involvement of the local population, which goes beyond the mere search for funding and also includes the readiness to invest with own resources for the realization of the desired projects. European (but also national, etc.) funding should therefore not be seen as the goal to be achieved, but more as a means to achieve a desired result more effectively and quickly.

Thus, from M14 to M24, in parallel to the creation of the clusters (1.d.2.), the most suitable funding lines (eligible territories, planned calls, available funds, etc.) will be identified for the selected priority action drafts (roadmaps) to implement possible projects (or parts of them). On the basis of the themes of the projects and the availability of resources, the advisability of a direct membership of the EGTC or of its individual members (or both) in the project consortia to be set up will then be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. At this stage of the EGTC's development (see 1.a.), as is the case of current projects, the choice of joining as a partner (or favouring the entry of members as partners) in consortia with proven Lead Partners seems wise, rather than that of aiming at proposing oneself as Lead Partner.

A slightly different approach can be applied to action drafts dealing with transversal themes (e.g. capacity building and training), for which it would be important to test an approach in defined cross-border contexts, and extend them to all EGTC territories, as a second step. A concept is already prepared and is to be submitted as a funding project in the CLLD - Heuopen - Interreg IT-AT funding programme: the project relates to the expansion and transnational further development of a training programme and platform for dialogue between the members and all stakeholders involved in the transfer of knowledge and the opportunity disseminate recommendations for action. The project duration is planned for 1.5 years.

Until M24 the EGTC also intends to initiate consultations with the managing authorities of the most territorially relevant funding programmes (e.g. Interreg IT-AT) and to lay the foundations for applying in the medium term for funding through the resources of the ITI funds, for the implementation of more ambitious projects (also in terms of resources) on the topic of environmentally friendly mobility as a central element for sustainable tourism.

Based on the results of the actions carried out up to M24, further measures can be planned to be implemented in the last 12 months of the CM project and beyond.

## 2. Optimization of the added value of being Alpine Pearls members

### 2.a. Capacity building activities and support to the members

The primary objective of the EGTC Alpine Pearls is to foster transnational cooperation between tourist destinations in the Alps to promote community-led sustainable development of mountain areas. The more qualified the contribution that each member municipality can bring to the cooperation, the more stimulating



and effective the cooperation will be. For this reason, the network's top priority is to carry out a series of multiple capacity-building activities aimed at its members, involving, according to the themes, all the most important stakeholder categories (from administrators to tour operators) and always bearing in mind how fundamental it is, in the elaboration of tourism strategies, to take into account the needs of local inhabitants. The higher the quality of life in an alpine tourist destination (especially in terms of sustainability), the more attractive it is to guests.

Within this framework, the goal of the following Measures is to offer stakeholders multiple activities aimed at increasing their know-how on sustainable tourism issues, fostering fruitful interactions between member localities and supporting them in the development and implementation of their strategic plans.

### Measure 2.a.1: Platform for exchange between members

The period from M14 to M24 is dedicated to the creation and development of an online exchange platform (e.g. Teams, or other types of collaborative platforms) accessible to all key stakeholders in the member localities. The platform will showcase the best-practices of other localities (already implemented or in the process of implementation), interact with them to explore aspects of interest, consult the action plans of individual localities and their progress, and access a large database of contacts and partners.

In the meanwhile, from M14 to M26 in-person events (possibly in combination with the planned EGTC member meetings, M19 and M25) will be organized to which all key stakeholders will be invited and during which best-practices will be presented and discussed and co-design workshops will be animated to develop joint projects between localities with similar objectives.

The event in M19 will also be an opportunity to gather feedback and inputs to optimise the exchange platform, while the event in M25 will outline guidelines on how to continue the activities until the end of the project and beyond.

### Measure 2.a.2: Academy

In M14 the organisation of webinars and online workshops addressed to stakeholders and relevant target groups of member municipalities on specific topics related to sustainability and environmentally friendly mobility will start. The aim is to consistently provide opportunities to acquire know-how on EGTC core topics and training opportunities for specific target groups (e.g. tourism operators). Particular attention will be paid to the involvement of young people, whose active participation is fundamental to ensuring sustainable development strategies in Alpine communities.

This activity is foreseen to continue also after project closure, but from M14 to M30, at least 5 such training events will be organised, which may be complemented by other activities aimed at specific targets. The choice of topics will be made on the basis of indications gathered through an ongoing exchange with stakeholders. The referents of the webinars will be carefully chosen - they may be representatives of the member Municipalities (in the case of best practices of particular relevance to be presented to the rest of the network) or external experts identified by the EGTC.

Each webinar will include, at the end of the speakers' presentations, interactive moments of exchange between the participants and the speakers. All webinars will then be made available online to those who attended and to the entire network of stakeholders in the member localities.

### Measure 2.a.3: Support in the development and implementation of local action plans



Starting from M14 the EGTC Alpine Pearls will provide ongoing support to its member localities in the development of their action plans. In addition to the creation and management of the exchange platform (Measure 2.a.1.), a proactive exchange with and among the contact persons designated by the core teams of each Member municipality (2.b.1) will be fostered, to promote the exchange of information, advice, inputs and useful contacts.

This activity will be continuously optimised and will continue after the CM project has ended.

From M20 to M25 an analysis of the status of development and implementation of the action plans of each member municipality will be conducted (M20-M24) and presented during an in-person meeting in M25. This analysis will allow the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the work carried out by each member municipality but should also provide valuable indications on how to optimise the role of the EGTC in supporting, through transnational cooperation, the sustainable development strategies of each member.

## 2.b. Working groups for the development and implementation of local action plans.

Aware of the fact that cooperation is only as strong as its weakest link, the EGTC Alpine Pearls aims to have member localities that are proactive and committed to their fullest potential in achieving common goals.

In order to foster an effective development of the EGTC's themes at the local level and at the same time to ensure a constant vertical interaction between the member localities and the EGTC, the member localities have to commit themselves to set up working groups (core teams) and to appoint an Alpine Pearls delegate (Pearl coach).

The core teams are in charge of preparing, monitoring, improving and implementing local action plans, defining measures and projects which should be implemented in the next 5 years, in order to reach the target criteria defined by the EGTC Alpine Pearls.

This means that the following measures goal is to make membership in the EGTC Alpine Pearls a source of inspiration and motivation to foster cooperation at local level between all the main stakeholders (core teams of the Pearls), thus creating the prerequisites for medium-long term strategic planning aimed at pursuing sustainable tourism development in the area (action plans of the individual Pearls) in line with the philosophy and the main goals of the EGTC Alpine Pearls (see chapter 4).

### Measure 2.b.1: Local core teams

Starting from M14 each Pearl has to set up a working group (core team) involving all key stakeholders at the local level and beyond. The core team has a guiding function for all activities at the local level and includes the Pearl coach as well as representatives of the municipality, tourism association, hoteliers and other strategically relevant partners. The involvement of young people (e.g. as “Young Pearl Ambassadors”, identified through specific activities or contests) in the core team is crucial.

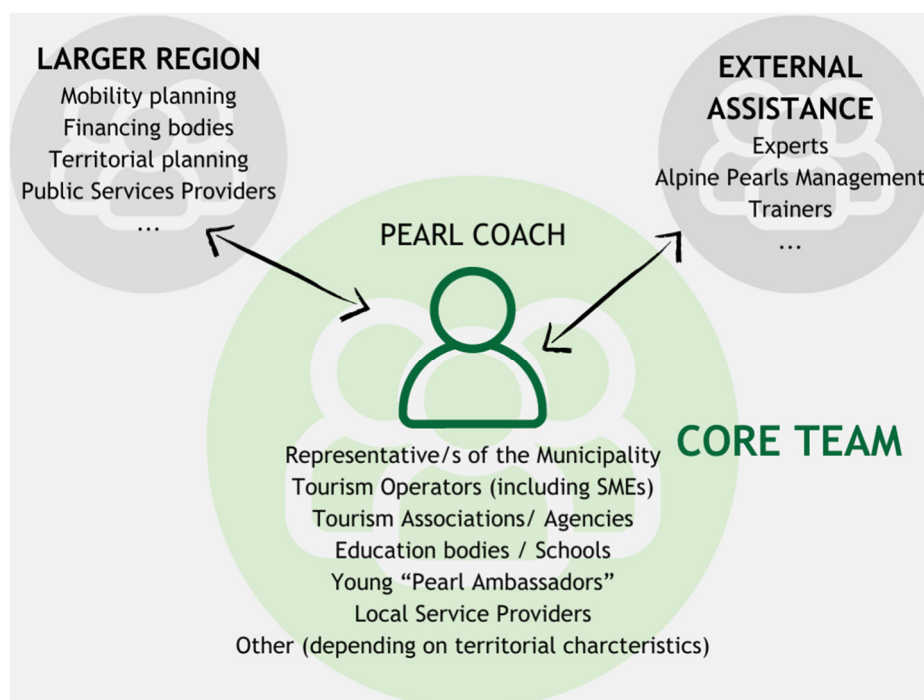
The Pearl coach is the coordinator of the core team and is responsible for the implementation of projects and activities defined in the action plan. The Pearl coach is also the main contact person for the EGTC and guarantees a constant and fruitful exchange between the member and the EGTC. Some Pearls already have a well-structured working group and a main contact person responsible for relations with the EGTC and coordination of the core team. In other Pearls, the core team is in the process of being established.

The aim is not to have identical structures in all member localities, since depending on the peculiarities of individual territories both the number and type of stakeholders and target groups to be involved in the core teams may vary even significantly.



The objective of this action plan is to have well-structured and functioning core teams in all member localities by M22 of the project. In the meanwhile, the EGTC (M14 to M18) will analyse the state of the art of each Pearl and can offer support to those member localities that have more difficulties in forming a core team, providing input through best practices from other localities and advice on which stakeholders and target groups to involve in the core team and how to do it, if there are difficulties in motivating them.

Once established, the core teams should meet at least once every 4 months. Of course, core teams should not be seen as static structures, but they can be expanded or restructured as needed, also taking into account the turnover of people that often characterizes certain sectors, as tourism.



The diagram above represents the importance of teamwork among each member of the EGTC Alpine Pearl to grant a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the coherent and sustainable development of each team. Therefore, an organisational chart was chosen that does not represent hierarchies, but the far more important networking within the respective Pearl and beyond. At the centre is the Pearl Coach: this person must be the engine and coordinator of a motivated, competent and decision-making team. This is the only way to develop innovative ideas and implement concrete actions. In the individual spheres of competence, each member of the core team indicates their respective responsibilities within our EGTC community, as well as any other relevant responsibilities and links.

### Measure 2.b.2: Dynamic development and implementation of local action plans

The EGTC Alpine Pearls has defined a set of basic criteria, which each municipality or destination must fulfil in order to join the network. These criteria focus on the topic of sustainable mobility, which is the main working field of the EGTC Alpine Pearls.

These criteria range from more general ones (commitment to sustainable principles, approved mobility concepts, infrastructural characteristics, alpine characteristics, etc.) to specific eco-friendly mobility criteria (e.g. mobility guarantee to guests arriving by green transports, such as train, or who refrain from using private cars).

In addition to this, target criteria (related to the topic of mobility and other sustainability-related aspects) have been defined, which each partner commits to achieve step by step, by drawing up a five-year local





action plan that will be constantly monitored, optimized and further developed according to the status of implementation of the various projects planned.

From M14 each member locality will have to finalise the drafting of its local action plan (timelines follow those already identified in point 2.a.3.) and proceed as efficiently as possible with the implementation of the projects envisaged therein. The core teams of each Pearl (see 2.b.1.) play a key role in the development and implementation of local action plans. It should be ensured that the contents of these documents do not remain largely a statement of intent but are transformed step by step into reality. Some measures can be implemented as originally planned, others will probably have to be readjusted according to difficulties, but also to opportunities or needs that have arisen.

## 7. Timeline

The timeline is organised by paying attention to the first joint activities which do not have to fail, and success stories must be carefully chosen and presented to raise support for the next joint activities.

At the beginning, more feasible tasks are set so that people supposed to work together in the future have time to familiarise themselves. In the case of Alpine Pearls some representatives of the member municipalities do already know each other. This advantage should be used, and new stakeholders should be involved.

Specific results should be achieved within the project lifetime (e.g. improving governance structures), although long-term planning (objectives to be achieved also after the end of the project) should be included. The piloting defined in the action plan should be implemented by the end of period 5 at the latest.

For the timeline of the single Measures:

	M13	M14	M15	M16	M17	M18	M19	M20	M21	M22	M23	M24	M25	M26	M27	M28	M29	M30	M31	M32	M33	M34	M35	M36	
1.a.1																									
1.a.2																									
1.b.1																									
1.b.2																									
1.c.1																									
1.c.2																									
1.d.1																									
1.d.2																									
1.d.3																									
2.a.1																									
2.a.2																									
2.a.3																									
2.b.1																									
2.b.2																									

All activities are designed to be sustainable and as detailed in the descriptions of each Measure, most of them will continue after project closure.

## 8. Resources

Needed resources have been estimated and they mostly coincide with those already engaged in the CM project implementation (2 staff members + external experts)



An external contract is foreseen for supporting D.2.2.2. (coordination of the measures, support for meetings and consultation with stakeholders, support for elaboration of strategic documents).

In addition, the management of Alpine Pearls and the various decision-making bodies will actively contribute to ensuring the effective implementation of the action plan.

As outlined above, also Alpine Pearls core teams will be involved in action planning activities and piloting.

## 9. Responsibilities

As with all other Alpine Pearls EGTC activities, responsibility is shared on two levels:

- on the one hand, the EGTC itself, with its staff and bodies
- on the other, the individual members, as the real implementers and beneficiaries of the actions.

This double level guarantees an effective achievement of the expected results and a common sense of belonging and ownership of the work done, a true instrument of transnational cooperation.

From an operational point of view, the responsibility for the implementation of this work lies with the project staff, the EGTC management and its decision-making bodies, as well as with the external experts to be contracted.

## 10. Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation and monitoring are integrated into the individual measures as they are designed.

Monitoring, in particular, is evident and constant thanks to the very structuring of the activities, which are interwoven and/or made up of numerous moments of confrontation and meetings (board meetings, strategic meetings, General meetings, etc.) for which defined moments dedicated to adjustments, review and updates are foreseen (see paragraph 12).

## 11. Risks and Contingencies

Considering that the action planning work envisaged by the EGTC Alpine Pearls is based on the active involvement of many stakeholders, among which the Alpine Pearls' localities are a priority, the main risks that could jeopardise networking and co-design activities are related to changes of administration at the local level (e.g. municipal elections, changes in the management of tourist boards, etc.).

Such changes in decision-making powers might therefore slow down the action or make partners less active in participation.

However, the establishment of multi-functional and multi-person Core Teams reduces this risk by ensuring continuity of work.

A similar risk could be run at the EGTC level, where a structural change could slow down partner support and coordination action.

However, this risk is considered unlikely for several reasons, including the existence of a convention and bylaws with a very clear and widely shared mission. Moreover, the action itself focuses on improving the governance structure, but keeping objectives and purpose intact.



## 12. Review and Adjustment

Adjustments and modifications of the action plan will be fundamental. To guarantee broad participation in the decisional process, the General meetings of the EGTC will be the occasion to monitor the implementation of the action plan and to adjust it, if necessary, following this hypothetical timeline:

- May 2024 - presentation action plan
- October 2024 - Review and Update 1
- May 2025 - Review and Update 2
- October 2025 - Presentation of the work done and follow-up

## 13. Communication Plan

Communication activities entail:

- For internal communication (with members), which is very important: presentation of the action plan, implementation updates, etc. in the monthly report of the EGTC
- Periodical integration of “work in progress” news in the newsletter issued for stakeholders.
- Presentation of the project/plan within conferences etc.
- Informing regional authorities and other EGTCs about action plan and implementation (bilateral meetings, European Cross Border Platform, etc.)

## 14. Conclusions

It is evident that the result expected from what is described above is achievable on two levels: optimising the EGTC Alpine Pearls governance structure and boosting the full potential of members, both as individual actors and as an integrated (horizontally and/or vertically) network.

The EGTC Alpine Pearls aims to become the platform for transnational cooperation between tourism destinations in the Alpine region on the core topic of sustainable and eco-friendly mobility.

This calls for an empowering process within the EGTC to achieve social, economic and ecologic sustainability, professionalisation of the participating network and improve mobility solutions for visitors and inhabitants.

This also means showing and demonstrating the added value of being an Alpine Pearls destination and EGTC member, not only to easily access European Funding, but mostly to be part of a lively, innovative and cooperative network of destinations able to attract newcomers and provide a high quality of life to its inhabitants. And, ultimately, be chosen by visitors and tourists.

The pilot action (D.2.2.2) foreseen within the Central Mountains Project and stemming from this Action Plan will thus enhance participatory governance within Alpine Pearls EGTC and action plans preparation of individual member municipalities, including capacity building and exchange of experience activities, organised at transnational and cross-border level.

At the end of the Piloting phase, in project month 29/30 three strategic documents will be issued\_



- Improved governance for the EGTC Alpine Pearls (deriving mostly from Measures 1a, and 1c)
- Roadmap for future EGTC Alpine Pearls financing (deriving mostly from Measure 1b)
- Project pipeline (deriving mostly from Action 1d)
- Piloting cooperation (deriving mostly from Measures 2a, and 2b)

## 15. Approvals

The present document will be approved by the Management of the Alpine Pearls in March 2024 and then be presented to the Board and the members in the following months.