The macroregional strategy for the Alpine area seen from the perspective of a transnational programme

How can a transnational programme contribute to a macroregional strategy?

And how can one prepare for something that does not yet exist? It was mid 2011 when first concrete ideas on a potential macroregional strategy for the Alpine region came up. And it was the time when the partner states of the Alpine Space programme started to prepare for the programming period 2014-2020. The cooperation programme was finalised and approved by the European Commission in December 2014, the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) was established in June 2015. Thus, the programme partners were confronted with the challenge to define a multi-annual funding programme without knowing if and how a macroregional strategy for the area would be set up. The main questions at that time were:

- How shall a long-term strategic orientation for the Alpine area look like?
- Which key funding priorities shall be defined for the Alpine Space Programme 2014-2020?
- How can the Alpine Space Programme best contribute to the debate on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps?

Policy-making in the Alpine Region is specific, mainly for two reasons

The Alpine area is clearly dominated by the territorial characteristics of the Alps, on the other hand it is all but homogenous: the area features high mountains and lowlands, remote areas and European crossroads, rural areas and global cities. These common specifics and this variety and diversity call for cooperation. That is why the area has a long tradition of alpine-wide cooperation. And the numerous cooperating organisations and actors such as Alpine Convention, Interreg-programmes, Arge Alp, CIPRA have a different understanding of the Alps and why cooperation is necessary. Thus, it is necessary to reach shared views of all these actors.

The Alpine Space Programme commissioned a study in 2011. A team of experts from various countries and fields of expertise (e.g. tourism, mobility, innovation) was asked to provide for answers on the above-mentioned questions. They carried out a cross-analysis of the main challenges which the Alpine area is facing and the different types of territories (e.g. Alpine metropolises, tourism areas, shrinking rural areas).
With the aim to create broad ownership and common understanding the programme launched an intense stakeholder dialogue: a number of workshops was organised in the single partner states and an online survey was carried out. In the end more than 1,400 people from various countries, administrative levels and sectors and especially also the civil society had their say and gave input to the finalisation of the study. The final report of the experts was widely shared and provided for valuable insights and conclusions. The report and the documentation on the whole process can be found on the following website:


Three functions that a transnational programme can fulfill

A transnational programme like Interreg Alpine Space can mainly assume three roles:

a) It can be *selective* in triggering and funding projects that provide a clear contribution to reaching the overall goals and expected results as defined for the cooperation area,
b) It can be *holistic* in feeding comprehensive debates on long-term alpine development and
c) it can be *inclusive* in providing a platform for exchange and supporting alpine networks and dialogues.

Impulses and support that the Alpine Space Programme can give to EUSALP

In general, a transnational programme is about policy-making. In assuming the above-mentioned roles it can help to develop strategies, to test them, to implement and further improve them. EUSALP can benefit from the effects of the programme’s policy cycle.
In concrete terms, the following support and links have been established between Interreg Alpine Space and EUSALP:

- Interreg Alpine Space is member of the EUSALP Executive Board and involved in all nine EUSALP Action Groups where it brings in expertise and concrete results of transnational cooperation,
- in its calls for project proposals the programme asks the applicants to study the EUSALP Action Plan and to consider if and how their project could contribute to EUSALP,
- the programme plans to organise seminars and workshops to bring partners of co-funded projects and EUSALP Action Group leaders and members together,

\(^1\) Gloersen et. al, Strategy Development for the Alpine Space, Final Report, 2013, p 118
the programme has granted around 3 mio ERDF to the project „AlpGov“ which was set up by the nine EUSALP Action Group Leaders and which shall help them to fulfill their tasks in a coordinated way (e.g. activities to implement the EUSALP Action Plan, communication measures, mapping stakeholders and financial resources in the area, etc.).

First reflections and outlook

Looking back on the first months of EUSALP it can be stated from programme view that a lot has already been achieved in getting the strategy started, settling the governance and tackle the Action Plan with concrete measures. However, it seems as if Interreg Alpine Space is still in the main focus as funding source of the organisations being involved in EUSALP. This is understandable as it has unfortunately not been possible to clearly focus EUSALP on one or two issues which really call for a longterm commitment and coordinated action for which a macro-regional strategy is meant as framework. Now, as the objectives of EUSALP and funding topics of Interreg Alpine Space are to a considerable extent identical, it is tempting to think that an Alpine Space project can grant the funding and an appropriate solution.

The Alpine Space programme has a volume of roughly 140 mio Euro for an implementation period of seven years. With this budget no more than around 50 projects can be co-financed which shall clearly contribute to objectives set by the programme. Thus, organisations involved in EUSALP should indeed also identify other funding sources and carefully consider which activities to set in the framework of one of several suitable Interreg-programmes and which to implement in other funding schemes or frameworks (e.g. coordinated legislative actions).

EUSALP will only be a success-story if all players really permanently use this framework to better coordinate actions in view of the common challenges. Thus, it will be a challenge to mobilise actors in the long term and to maintain the political committment. And at an appropriate point of time common conclusions should be drawn so that concrete activities to prepare the next programming period 2020+ can be set. Interreg Alpine Space is ready to contribute to this discussion.