PRESS RELEASE

ARDIA-Net Final Conference's
keynote "The Alpine way: a new mindset for cross-regional and cross-sectoral cooperation"

The ARDIA-Net Final Conference was held in the Acquario Civico of Milan on 11th May 2022 and organised by the Lombardy Green Chemistry Association with the support of the Municipality of Milan. Entitled "Good practices and built capacities for cross-regional cooperation in the Alpine Region and beyond", the hybrid event gathered 35 participants. The agenda can be consulted here.

The keynote "**The Alpine way: a new mindset for cross-regional and cross-sectoral cooperation**" presented by **Prof. Dr. Ralf Kindervater**, CEO of BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg GmbH (Lead Partner of ARDIA-Net) is highlighted in this press release. Through the keynote, the reader gets an overview on the status of (Research, Development and Innovation based) cross-regional cooperation in Europe before the start of ARDIA-Net. It describes the political and socio-economic environment that shaped the implementation of the project and underlines its valuable contribution. Finally, it reflects on what degree the good practices delivered and the new regulation of the programming period (2021-2027) shall reinforce a new mindset in this regard.

<u>Keynote transcribed</u>

When did all start

When ARDIA-Net proposal was drafted in winter 2019, several initiatives related to cross-regional cooperation in RDI and joint programming were already in place. By one side there was the **ERA-Net scheme**, already implemented successfully in different nations and regions of Europe for the last 20 years. On top of this there were the last Research & Innovation Framework Programmes of the European Commission, namely **FP7 and Horizon 2020**, that funded projects with a transnational approach, also involving regional partners. There were also more specific and target oriented undertakings at macro-regional level such as the **Baltic Sea Network "European Social Fund (BSN-ESF)"**, an initiative much closer to the mission of ARDIA-Net. This network supported by the Swedish Institute and initiated in 2011, was indeed the first hands-on approach for embedding "mainstream" programmes in the macro-regional strategy (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, in this case).

It is also necessary not to forget the bunch of **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)** belonging to the programming period 2014-2020, that included in essence cross-regional cooperation within their principle. In this sense the Vanguard Initiative (2013), one of the few "adventures" on cross-regional cooperation based in S3 and particularly on bioeconomy till date. Its **Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P) on bioeconomy** has been ongoing since 2016, with seven Alpine regions participating (namely, Autonomous Province of Trento, Lombardy, Lower Austria, Piedmont, Slovenia, South Tyrol and Upper Austria) but - geographically speaking- it is not limited to the Alpine Space.

Moreover, the **operational programmes**, using the approaches set by the Smart Specialisation Strategies since 2013, should have shown during this time period more examples of cross-regional efforts between programme managers; in fact, the real practice is still stagnant in this sense. Till date many regional administrators have "blamed" the legal framework as a hiccup to reverse this situation.

As a result of all these endeavors one conclusion can be drawn: many of the former initiatives (e.g. ERA-Net, R&I Framework Programme) are key to bring the **European Research Area** forward, but often they are not tailor-made to support RDI in the macro-regional context. They require usually European wide RDI consortia. Other European-funded support schemes, such as Interreg, are better aligned with the macro-regional framework, but rarely support RDI specific cross-border cooperation. As conclusion, a persistent funding gap has been tracked in the last decade at the level of cross-regional RDI projects. **And exactly here is where a project like ARDIA-Net makes really sense.** ARDIA-Net commenced its journey in October 2019 with a **strong driver: to develop approaches and good practices to counteract the recurrent "lost opportunities" to support the economy of the Alps with cross-regional cooperation.**

Co-living with transitional times and uncertainty

Since Spring 2020 several drastic circumstances and events have shaped our daily life and national/regional/local economies. The announcement of the **European Green Deal** in December 2019 was received as a breeze of fresh air for all those policy-makers, regional development organizations and companies that had a non-fossil economy high in their policy / industrial agendas. It was also welcome for all those visionaries and citizens that considered the Deal as a unique opportunity to transform the economic model. This process was unveiled in perfect timing with the course of ARDIA-Net and **its main two economic axes: circular bioeconomy and health economy**. Both topics were considered in the project proposal because of their key strategic role for the economic development of the Alpine Space. **Digitalisation**, as overarching theme, was also timely embedded in the intervention logic of the project due to its relevance in the Green Deal, but also as an effective tool to respond quickly to the pandemic, that came a bit later. Since March 2020 the **malfunction of many global value chains** just pinpointed the need to make them **more resilient**, thus giving digitalisation and the macro-regional scope increasingly a key role in this regard.

Behind the expected transformation of the economy proposed by the Green Deal, a window of new opportunities for innovation and investment and jobs is foreseen. And **exactly there is where a common RDI area in the Alpine Region and the way in which funding programmes are designed play its role**. It is not advantageous to say that ARDIA-Net gained more credibility and relevance as a result of the contemporary political process. All capacity building actions undertaken during its implementation, addressed to change behavior and influence attitude of programme owners, were just integral part of a quest for transformation. In a nutshell, **the Green Deal resulted to be an (unexpected) perfect backdrop for the implementation of ARDIA-Net, since topics such as circular (bio)economy gained momentum in the national and regional policy agendas**.

As a second casualty, a **pandemic** broke up free in Europe from March 2020 onwards and it is still kicking. The length of the supply chains for many manufacturing and service companies were re-designed during the pandemic. Among its grave consequences for the national health systems in Europe, a side-effect of the pandemic was showing **how vulnerable global value and supply chains could be**, despite good socio-economic and political conditions set previously in place. Suddenly, the obvious question of "Where does everything come from?" turned into a new question: "Do and where we get it at all?". A paradigm shift was unveiled. Since then, the challenging question is "How do we position ourselves or mitigate such crises in the future?". And the answer has a lot to do with **resilience**.

The concept of resilience opens the possibilities to regional capabilities or to capabilities that are shared within macro-regions, so considered as multi-regional. The **development of the S3 strategies for cross-regional cooperation** more than ten years ago could be a key basis for this approach. Parallelly through

building-up the four EU macro-regions for a similar amount of years, macro-regional work and networking have turned to be pivotal to move Europe forward and strengthen its economy. For this purpose, **the involvement of the regions at the policy-level is of great importance**. A common funding framework can simplify cross-regional cooperation within the macro-regions. And in this sense, **the ultimate mission of ARDIA-Net was to build a network for future cooperation between regions and make it operational through a multi-level governance approach**.

The third major breakthrough co-existing with the project implementation has been the start of the **war in Ukraine** in February 2022. Here again, the situation has posed strong pressure to the state of the value chains (particularly, food- and energy-related). The conflict has shown us again how important and relevant cross-macro-regional work is, not only from the geopolitical side, but also from the perspective of plain subsistence of our beloved European citizenship.

Green Shoots for a new mindset

Previous experiences in the **Baltic Sea Region**, the **Vanguard Initiative** at European level and success stories of ARDIA-Net, such as the pilot call **Innovation Express 2021**, are green shoots for **a new mindset that should allow regional administrators to think and act beyond borders**. Indeed, the last experience demonstrates that synchronization of funding schemes is not so difficult as it is often said.

Can our Alpine Region already be a frontrunner in this regard?

The cooperation schemes developed through ARDIA-Net strived for putting regions in the driving seat of the design of these schemes. In the case of the **pilot call Innovation Express 2021** (3 out of the 4 regions belonged to the Alpine macro-region), the regional administrators could determine themselves funding priorities, beneficiaries, timing of the call and duration of the projects, among other features; and it also represented a rapid reaction to pandemic-related issues.

ARDIA-net was a concrete and impact-oriented contribution to turn S3 (and now S4+) principles into practice[1]. The rationale behind the work done by ARDIA-Net partners was to design a scheme that would require less effort to be implemented and maintained, since this is key for its better adoption. On top of this, the expertise of the ARDIA-Network remains available after project end and should be considered as integral part of a wider consolidated multi-level governance scheme in the Alpine Region. The **ARDIA-Network**, a kind of legacy of this project, could identify and promote future RDI cooperation, support a new call, administrate matchmaking platforms, as well as facilitate contacts within and with other regions. Also, an **Alpine network of managing authorities, à la Baltic Sea Network**, could be a promising option to continuously exchange information at ministerial level on ongoing and upcoming funding programmes that can be subject to synchronization. Perhaps this can be further elaborated by the panelists of the second panel today.

Another complementary form of cooperation that gained strong impetus during ARDIA-Net implementation is the **Cooperation under IJG goal 2020+ (Investments for Jobs & Growth) within the Common Provisions Regulation of EU Cohesion Policy**, that should facilitate cooperation beyond the borders of a given region or country. The degree of cooperation and commitment among the territories involved can vary, so the approach of cooperation is not much different to the need-based approach described in the **AlpsConnect scheme[2]**, that will be presented during the first panel.

The European legislators have agreed funds regulations for the new funding period 2021-2027 that ensures an increased role for macro-regional strategies by one side, and a **strengthened cooperation component**

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[1] S3 has been renamed to S4+ in the programming period 2021-27, embedding the social and sustainable component in its principles. S4+ is the acronym for "Smart Specialisation strategies for sustainable and inclusive growth".
[2] https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/ardia-net/results/press-release/factsheet-ardia-net-rev3.pdf, last accessed 24/05/2022

now mandatory in all EU regional development funds. This results in a much-strengthened role of cooperation actors and a recognition of the work done in transnational or cross-border projects so far[3].

Outreach

The **outreach of ARDIA-Net**, through its **33 month-long duration**, is summarized in the following graphic:

People	Events & Documentation
8 partners 5 countries 7 Alpine regions 12 Observers 1 Multi-level expert group > 70 Public bodies > 75 Business support organisations, SMEs and enterprises > 50 Higher education and research 232 Followers on LinkedIn	8 Living Labs 20 Capacity Building activities 1 Cross-regional Cooperation Scheme: AlpsConnect 1 Blueprint 1 Pilot call: Innovation Express 2021 1 Policy Forum 1 Stakeholder Session during EU Macro-regional Strategies Week 2022 3 Policy memos 24 Press Releases 2 videos

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ARDIA-Net consortium is composed of: BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg GmbH and Bavarian Research Alliance GmbH (Germany), Business Upper Austria - OÖ Wirtschaftsagentur GmbH and Innovations- und Technologietransfer Salzburg GmbH (Austria), Lombardy Green Chemistry Association and SC-Sviluppo Chimica S.p.A. (Italy), Poly4EmI hosted by Anteja ECG d.o.o. (Slovenia), and University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland - School of Engineering and Architecture of Fribourg (Switzerland).

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[3] Adopted from a text written by David Matzek-Lichtenstein for the preface of the Final Publication (to be published in June 2022)