



A.T3.3 Development of policy recommendations and strategies for the positioning of the Alpine Space as health tourism destination

D.T3.3.3 Report on recommendations for regional EU programmes

October 2022

Editorial

The implementation of developing Alpine Health Tourism can not only be up to the actors in the regions, but also to the policy, which should further improve and develop the framework conditions in the field of nature-based health tourism.

The analysis presented here of the current EU funding programmes at **regional (micro level D.T3.3.3), cross-border (meso level D.T3.3.2)** and **transnational level (macro level D.T3.3.1)** shows in which areas which steps are necessary to further improve the framework conditions for nature-based health tourism, especially in the Alpine Space.

An undisputed strength of the Alps is their unique natural and cultivated landscapes – waterfalls, dense forests, pure mountain air, meadows full of flowers and herbs, and much more besides. Promoting the beauty of these is a strategy – while recognizing their healing power and thus developing health tourism offers is a successful strategy.

With its unique mountain world, diverse climate, outstanding biodiversity and cultural heritage, the Alpine region offers numerous opportunities for empowering and enabling people to make life choices that benefit their health.

Overall, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, there is a myriad of challenges to up-scaling and out-scaling of health-promoting tourism solutions in practice. The analysis has looked to some of the most important challenges it is facing regarding maintaining an effective aggregate transnational policy universe that keeps up to its promise of promoting a sustainable tourism ecosystem within the Alpine Space. Although there is a growing body of research in EU tourism policy, critical analyses into the structures, processes, efficacies and controversies of tourism policy formulation, implementation and practice are sparse. This report tried to address this void.

Certainly, this is a daunting task given the changing nature of current environmental challenges on the tourism industry at large. Nonetheless, research on these challenges and how they affect the efficacy of policy instruments applied has become ever more important should the “European project” survive its institutional crisis and overcome the general atmosphere of disillusionment on many levels.

Critically, on the level of principles, interventionist schemes of EU tourism policy are under pressure as government protection and support is a controversial means to regulate markets and seem to have in-built biases towards failure. Indeed, a combination of complexity, uncertainty and volatility is characteristic and explains a lot of what is unique about today's tourism practice and therefore why policy is distinctively challenging.

In fact, international policymakers have lately been successful in embedding sustainability into policies to address climate change and biodiversity loss and the EU has invested considerable resources in largescale demonstrations of the benefits of nature-based market economies across Europe. In the interim, the climate and biodiversity crisis won't wait.

Therefore, **secondly**, we advocate for sustained public sector investment in nature-based health tourism in the short term, accompanied by longer term transformative change measures in systems and processes to instigate the necessary shift towards a nature-based economy at large. Investment in health-promoting tourism should be accompanied by measures to ensure such investment leads to direct economic benefits in terms of increased innovation, enterprise and job creation in the private sector supplying sustainable tourism. Policy support programmes shall further be inspired by gaining insights on "actionable knowledge" from health tourism practice. This enhances "implementable validity" and "instrumental impact" by discussing critical challenges enterprises face in the process determining most effective paths of organizational innovation. We also wish to promote further research efforts on the health effects of nature-based health tourism products and services and help disseminate the research findings.

Thirdly, we propose lowering entry barriers of accessing funding opportunities at all levels of nature-based health tourism. In our view, this is necessary and shall help stimulating the establishment of networks of expertise on issues of health tourism in the Alps. Knowingly, these networks encompass a wide range of people which would all contribute to a better dissemination of knowledge across the board: local and regional administrations that have a legal competence for spatial planning and territorial development, chambers of commerce, industry or agriculture, labor market agencies, trade unions, employers' associations, private and public transport organizations, universities and education institutions, agencies for

tourism promotion, institutions managing natural resources and environmental organizations, cultural organizations at regional and local level, small businesses, SMEs, and more. The targeted funding of regional coordinating bodies that manage the selected regional development paths in the form of a mediator for the various stakeholders, considering the three dimensions of sustainability, can also represent an important step forward in funding. Finally, more information for the Alpine regions themselves on how to use these EU programs for an innovative development of health tourism should be part of the future politics.

Ultimately, arguments for and against public intervention into health tourism markets need to be based on resolving conflicting issues about the effects of political measures that promote it. This means that public policy activity on the tourism market must first be evaluated based on the extent to which the measures are suitable for strengthening economically disadvantaged actors for competition, preventing concentration processes that restrict competition, and booting economic opportunity in markets which lack financial resources.

In fact, it is necessary to examine whether public policy intervention contributes to ensuring market diversity while promoting ecological standards and meeting SDGs (particularly SDG3 to focus on health and wellbeing) while supporting health tourism activities.

Certainly, effective governance plans through means of direct subsidies for supporting a whole industry will first have to identify the big picture when aiming to resolve problems of an ailing or otherwise to be supported post-COVID tourism industry, all the way from setting clear and realistic objectives to measuring the effects of subsidy-impacted industry performance and output. This is not an easy task, as SDGs greatly challenge touristic performance as measured by appropriate value frameworks. As a corollary, this implies this requires the establishment of a strategic policy, budget, and monitoring/controlling framework for effective health-promoting tourism investments in the Alpine Space.

In all, actions in favor of nature-based health tourism are not just about achieving better health outcomes for tourists. Instead, the governance rationale, design, measures and instruments, procedures, and ensuing impacts shall benefit the whole health tourism ecosystem and all its players involved. Only this integrative approach will improve the accountability of policymakers for health impacts at all levels of policymaking. It includes an emphasis on the consequences

of public policies on health systems, determinants of health, and social well-being at large. It also contributes to sustainable development and the implementation of new strategies and practices for further strengthening Health-in-all Policies (HiAP) in the EU. Based on this rationale, we suggest a range of further concrete actions required to improve alignment across EC policies in support of nature-based health tourism market stimulation.

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Policies to stimulate demand and uptake of nature-based health-based tourism offerings in the Alpine Space are currently emerging, as it stands, to offer nature-based health products and services would perfectly complement a preventive public health system. Policymakers are thus advised to include more substantive measures to instigate transformative change towards sustainable tourism. All these now need to be addressed quickly, should the many systemic challenges in the tourism industry in the region be properly met.

EUSALP, the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, takes the uniqueness of the Alpine region as a key starting point.

The Alpine area is composed of territories with contrasted demographic, social and economic trends, and a great cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity goes along with a great variety of governance systems and traditions. Both the common specificities of the Alpine area and its variety and diversity call for cooperation. **An Alpine macro-regional strategy would provide an opportunity to improve cooperation in the Alpine States as well as identifying common goals and implementing them more effectively through transnational collaboration.**

EUSALP constitutes a strategic agenda that should guide relevant policy instruments at EU, national and regional level, by closely aligning and mutually reinforcing them.

However, albeit its huge potential, the Alpine Space is currently facing major challenges.

To confront these challenges, EUSALP has been launched in 2015 and provides an opportunity to improve cross-border cooperation among and between seven European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

EUSALP identifies common goals and effectively implements them ~~more~~ through transnational collaboration. Better cooperation between the regions and countries is, however, needed to tackle those challenges.

The EUSALP strategy is realized by the above-mentioned seven countries and their 48 regions. Main priority areas of EUSALP are (1) economic growth and innovation, (2) mobility and connectivity, and (3) environment and energy. Nine Action Groups (AGs) work on the implementation of these priority areas.

sectors, ~~with~~ focusing on the improvement of framework conditions and opportunities for SMEs.

EUSALP has the ambition to make a substantial contribution to the European Green Deal through promoting an “Alpine Green Deal”. An important element in this respect is the inauguration of the “Innovation Hub for Green Business Models”.

This Hub has identified the following list of key issues: Circular economy, bioeconomy, innovation platforms for industrial development, innovation for green

infrastructure-based business models (hydrogen), cluster-building for green innovation, innovative Alpine value-chains, and new skills for green jobs.

Hence, the key focus of EUSALP's Action Group 2 is on the following topics, which are transversal and interrelated. Action Group 2 shall:

- Accelerate the transition of Alpine tourism towards an ecological and all-season model, by supporting its actors and encouraging them to cooperate at both local and European levels
- Promote sustainable agriculture, pastoralism, and mountain forestry
- Support the SMEs transition for competitive and resilient value chains
- Unleash the potential of the data economy to reach the Alpine and EU strategic objectives

Moreover, **it promotes action for the implementation of innovative (publicly) funded projects in the context of the further development of sustainable tourism in the Alps.**

Regional 2021-2027

Regional 2021-2027	Priorities with focus on (health) tourism	Output Indicators	Eligibility criteria	Nature-based and health-promoting tourism
LEADER	Priority 1 Increasing value creation in agriculture, tourism, business, trade, SMEs, EPU, energy production	-	Utilisation of tourism potential, increase in added value, sustainability, use of natural resources, product and service innovation,	indirect link

References:

[Startseite | LEADER Oberösterreich](#)

[LEADER/CLLD | Europäische Netzwerk für die Entwicklung des ländlichen Raums \(ENRD\) \(europa.eu\)](#)