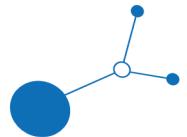


Central Mountains

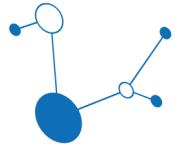


Solution 3.2.2

Transnational structures for long-term cooperation in mountain areas

Piloting a renewed governance structure of the Alpine Pearls EGTC.





Solution 3.2.2.

Piloting a renewed governance structure of the Alpine Pearls EGTC.

Action-Oriented Governance: Strengthening Municipal Capacities within Alpine Pearls.

1. Rationale - Renewing EGTC governance for long-term, self-sustained cooperation

This document presents a single, integrated solution, derived from the pilot action implemented within the Alpine Pearls EGTC as part of the Central Mountains project.

The document consists of an introduction to the solution and the context in which it was developed, an analysis of the target groups involved, a description of the methods and tools used, an outline of the added value and uptake potential of the developed solution, some notions on how risk management is handled, and finally a section on post-project output ownership and durability.

This section will present the reasons and the justifications agreed for elaborating the proposed solution. The Interreg Central Mountains project aims at achieving long-lasting, sustainable cooperation across borders in mountain areas through improved governance structures and processes. Existing governance structures were renewed through pilot actions, resulting in the development of replicable methodologies. The Alpine Pearls EGTC is one such existing structure that implemented the project pilot actions.

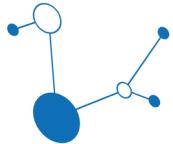
The following sections translate the practical experience of the Alpine Pearls EGTC into a structured and transferable approach that enables other cooperation bodies and networks to design and implement transnational structures for long-term cooperation.

The pilot provided a real-life testing ground: it demonstrated how a network of small, diverse, and cross-border municipalities can reform its governance model to become more resilient, participatory, and self-sustaining.

Building on this experience, the solution consolidates the lessons learned, systematises the processes, and defines the concepts, methods, and practical actions that can be replicated elsewhere. In this sense, it does not merely describe what was achieved during the pilot—it **codifies** how these results can be reproduced and scaled up by others.

Accordingly, the solution provides:

- a **conceptual framework** for structuring cooperation across borders and governance levels;
- **methodological guidance** outlining the steps to move from a pilot initiative to a stable transnational structure;
- and a **set of operational tools**—examples, participatory methods, and digital instruments—that ensure usability and replicability.



Together, these components form a **toolset** designed to help other regions and networks establish cooperation mechanisms that are both practical and durable.

Methodological Approach

The solution employs a systematic, replicable methodology that any cooperative entity can utilise to transition from an initial pilot phase to an established governance framework. An indicative implementation timeline is provided to facilitate strategic planning.

1) Assessing Context and Governance Requirements (Months 1-3)

Evaluate current cooperation patterns and challenges—such as limited stakeholder engagement, decentralised decision-making, or reliance on external oversight. Identify the most appropriate transnational structure to address these issues. This phase may include stakeholder mapping, needs assessments, and benchmarking analogous governance models.

2) Designing the Governance Framework (Months 4-6)

Collaboratively develop a governance structure that harmonises local independence with broader transnational alignment. Establish clear roles, decision-making protocols, communication channels, and resource distribution principles. Engage stakeholders through participatory workshops and internal consultations to promote transparency and collective ownership.

3) Creating Operational Instruments (Months 7-10)

Convert the governance strategy into actionable tools suited for diverse settings:

- a) **Guidelines and templates** for planning and monitoring activities (e.g., Local Action Plans);
- b) **A digital coordination and visibility platform** for both internal and external communication;
- c) **Participatory and training resources**, including academy-based modules and mentoring sessions;
- d) **Funding and project pipeline mechanisms** to align strategic objectives with financial opportunities.

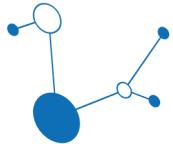
4) Piloting, Refining, and Institutionalising the Model (Months 11-14)

Trial the developed tools and governance arrangements in selected pilot sites or representative environments. Collect structured feedback, fine-tune procedures, and finalise the governance model. Ensure its long-term sustainability by embedding it within institutional strategies and action plans.

Tools and Outputs

The solution integrates strategic and operational instruments into a comprehensive guide that can be adopted or adapted by other cooperation bodies:

- governance guidelines and analysis for internal reorganisation;
- participatory and capacity-building activities;
- digital coordination and communication tools;



- examples for multi-level cooperation and alignment with EU and regional policies.

These elements form a modular and adaptive system, supporting both newly established and existing networks seeking to evolve into sustainable, self-managed structures.

Implementation by the EGTC

To ensure full implementation and continuity, the Alpine Pearls EGTC will organise the completion of this process through a structured internal roadmap built on three key pillars:

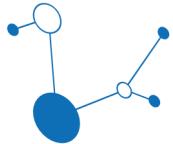
1. **Institutional consolidation:** the renewed governance model—validated during the project—will be consolidated, and the President and the internal coordination team will oversee the operational rollout of the model, progressively reducing external dependencies and ensuring self-management capacity.
2. **Capacity building and support mechanisms:** the Alpine Pearls Academy will continue to serve as the core instrument for knowledge transfer and peer learning, offering regular training cycles and thematic sessions on governance, sustainable tourism, and EU cooperation. Moreover, each member municipality will be supported in developing or updating its Local Action Plan through dedicated mentoring and shared templates.
3. **Transnational scaling and cooperation:** the EGTC will maintain and expand its partnerships with other networks and institutions (e.g. Carpathian Euroregion, TourCert, Alpine Convention) to promote replication and mutual learning. The digital coordination platform will remain active as the central hub for document sharing, visibility, and project development. A continuous project pipeline will ensure financial sustainability, aligning future actions with European, national, and regional funding programmes.

Through this organisational framework, the Alpine Pearls EGTC will complete, stabilise, and extend the transformation initiated by the pilot action—turning it into a permanent governance model for transnational cooperation.

2. Solution Introduction

The Alpine Pearls EGTC faces a territorial governance gap: its member municipalities—often small, rural, and cross-border—struggle to engage effectively in shared strategic planning and European cooperation. The legacy of external management (Brandnamic) resulted in limited internal ownership, uneven member participation, and high operational costs. To become a resilient and self-sustaining network, the EGTC needed a structural shift.

The transition to a leaner, internally coordinated structure (finalised in May 2025) was a necessary step to empower local actors, reduce costs, and ensure day-to-day responsiveness. Through participatory workshops, interviews, and training (Alpine Pearls Academy), tasks were redistributed internally, and the President consolidated its role as Director (as foreseen already in the Statute). This co-designed model has:



- Enhanced internal coordination and clarity.
- Activated local core teams in pilot areas (e.g. Alta Valle Arroscia (as a learning Pearl, i.e. not yet part of the membership but willing to access it, Bohinj, etc.).
- Laid the foundation for long-term strategic autonomy.

Common values guide this transformation:

- Sustainability, as a shared responsibility.
- Cross-border cooperation, beyond administrative limits.
- Local empowerment, through knowledge and capacity.
- Transparency and flexibility, as operating principles.

The long-term goal is to create a self-propelling EGTC—a learning, connected and operational network capable of leading sustainable territorial development.

The solution emerged from clear problems:

- Uneven member commitment and confusion over roles.
- Lack of technical capacity in some smaller municipalities.
- Internal uncertainty during the governance shift.
- Limited youth and private sector involvement.

These issues made it clear: participatory governance can't be top-down. It must be tailored, inclusive, and adaptable to each territory's needs.

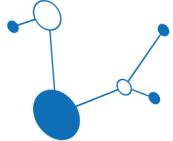
Building a strong internal capacity through engagement, trust, and shared processes is crucial to ensure Alpine Pearls can:

- Respond to territorial needs with agility.
- Position itself credibly in EU cooperation.
- Deliver real, measurable benefits to citizens, businesses, and youth.

Through this approach, the EGTC serves as a shared platform for collective intelligence, ensuring coherence between local priorities and cross-border ambitions.

3. Target Groups

The primary target audience for this solution set includes:



- Local and regional governments (member municipalities of the Alpine Pearls EGTC).
- Policymakers involved in sustainable tourism and territorial development.
- Cross-border cooperation bodies.
- NGOs, youth organisations, and sectoral stakeholders (tourism, mobility, energy).
- Educational institutions and research partners.

These actors are both users and drivers of the solution, and their ownership is critical for sustainability and impact.

The Alpine Pearls pilot adopted several participatory planning tools to engage its members and define the solutions:

- Visioning workshops were conducted to shape the EGTC's governance transition (e.g. internal workshop May 2025).
- Stakeholder interviews and mapping helped identify local priorities and tailor the Local Action Plans (e.g. San Martino, Cogne, etc).
- A shared digital platform was launched to support internal coordination and promote transparency.

These tools enabled bottom-up contributions from municipalities with diverse capacities and challenges.

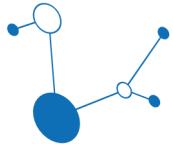
The solution emerged through strong cooperation among project partners and stakeholders, especially:

- ISIG, CIPRA and Eurac, who facilitated knowledge sharing and supported the design of participatory formats;
- Carpathian Euroregion, with whom cross-border collaboration was initiated (joint planning and knowledge exchange);
- Weissensee and TourCert, for shared practices in sustainable tourism.

The work took place in a multi-level and multilingual environment, involving stakeholders from different governance levels, reflecting the core values of transnational governance and territorial cohesion.

Key inputs were collected through formal and informal engagement:

- General Assembly April 2025: members requested clearer roles and more visibility tools.
- Board meetings (e.g. 20.11.2024, 30.01.2025): feedback on internal governance scenarios.
- Alpine Pearls Academy events: highlighted need for ongoing training and peer learning.
- Individual interviews (June - July 2025), provided inputs to better shape the involvement of members, better orienting the driving support the EGTC can offer (added value of being an Alpine Pearl)



- Reactive Youth project: confirmed the value of integrating young people in climate and tourism planning.

These insights directly informed the solution's design: a modular structure that accommodates diverse capacities, reinforces member ownership, and supports cross-border alignment.

The solutions are designed to be used by the same actors who helped shape them:

- Local teams can implement the Local Action Plans with EGTC support.
- Municipalities use the shared platform to access resources and share practices.
- Youth and SMEs are to be included via tailored tools (e.g. voucher system, informal education formats).

Through these mechanisms, the Alpine Pearls EGTC grows from a coordination structure into a collaborative engine for sustainable development, embedded in a shared, evolving vision.

4. Methods/Tools: The solution

Mountain municipalities, especially those involved in Alpine Pearls, often face fragmented governance, limited technical capacity, and difficulty accessing European cooperation opportunities. Spread across multiple Alpine countries, the network includes diverse administrative systems and socio-economic conditions, making strategic alignment a complex task.

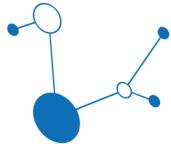
Until 2024, Alpine Pearls EGTC operated under an outsourced management model, resulting in:

- Low internal ownership,
- Limited engagement by some members,
- High fixed costs and limited flexibility.

In this context, the challenge was clear: how to build a lean, self-managed governance structure that empowers each member to contribute, while ensuring cohesion, transnational consistency, and long-term sustainability.

Key milestones:

- Board Workshops (Nov 2024-May 2025): testing and validation of internal restructuring scenarios;
- Internal Workshop (26.05.2025): redistribution of roles within the EGTC team;
- Alpine Pearls Academy sessions (2024-2025): engaging local stakeholders in defining action priorities;



- Cross-border dialogues (e.g. with Weissensee, Carpathian Euroregion, TourCert) to align priorities and ensure replicability beyond national borders.

The core components for a modular and adaptive governance and planning system are:

1. New Internal Structure for the EGTC

- President consolidated its role as Director for streamlined leadership (also foreseen by the Statute).
- Redistributed tasks among existing staff.
- Reduction of outsourced services (e.g. communication, management) to free resources.

2. Modular Roadmap for Local Action Plans (LAPs)

- A flexible format that allows each municipality to:
 - Set its own pace,
 - Choose relevant themes (e.g. mobility, climate, tourism),
 - Align with EGTC and EU strategies.
- Based on real examples from Alta Valle Arroscia (learning Pearl), Bohinj, Weissensee.

3. Digital Coordination and Visibility Platform

- Internal section: documents, templates, working groups.
- Public section: storytelling, project dissemination, best practices.

4. Alpine Pearls Academy

- Thematic trainings on tourism, energy, climate adaptation.
- Open to all members and their stakeholders.

5. Dynamic Project Pipeline Tool

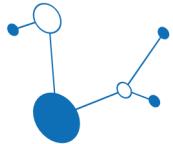
- Matches member needs with relevant funding programmes.
- Supports capacity-building and application drafting.
- Strengthens autonomy in developing projects still with the support of the EGTC team

Testing and Activation

Test Location: The Alpine Pearls network across Italy, Austria, Slovenia.

Commitments from each country/PP:

- Italy (e.g. Municipality of Cogne, San Martino):
 - Host Academy sessions and develop LAP templates.



- Involve students and youth in learning activities.
- Austria (e.g. Weissensee):
 - Test modular LAP approach and mobility solutions.
 - Contribute to ACT on ICE cultural cooperation project.
- Slovenia (e.g. Bohinj):
 - Share practices on climate adaptation.
 - Test voucher-based mobility incentives.

Further cooperation: Poland (Carpathian Euroregion):

- Act as a new cooperation node.
- Share governance lessons and funding tools.

These activities ensure true joint development across at least four countries, rooted in local realities.

The solution is designed for scalability:

- Letters of Commitment signed by EGTC members will secure political support post-project.
- The modular LAP model allows replication across other networks and EGTCs.
- The governance reform offers a tested model for lean, participatory, and cost-efficient cooperation structures, useful for similar transnational bodies.

The Alpine Pearls solution is not only a pilot—it's a permanent structural upgrade. The tools developed (digital platform, training model, governance structure) are already embedded in operational routines and are designed to grow beyond the project's lifetime.

This governance model is rare in transnational cooperation:

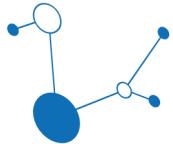
- Bottom-up flexibility: each municipality defines its own path while staying aligned with shared goals.
- Tailored capacity-building: tools adapt to varying administrative and technical capabilities.
- Cross-border replicability: tested in diverse contexts, making it relevant for other mountain regions.

Lessons learned from the pilot confirm that:

- Governance reform must be co-owned by members to be sustainable.
- Continuous capacity building is essential to maintain engagement.
- Tools gain value when co-designed across borders and rooted in real needs.

Expected Tangible Outcomes

- Internal governance reform → Increased percentage of internally managed tasks.
- Local Action Plans → Number of LAPs co-created with municipalities.



- Stakeholder engagement → Number of actors involved across countries.
- Capacity-building → Number of Academy sessions and participants.
- Project development → Number of projects generated via the pipeline tool.

These indicators allow the solution's progress to be tracked beyond the project lifecycle.

This solution is more than a technical fix. It's a new mindset for cooperation in mountain areas: adaptable, inclusive, and future-ready.

5. Added Value & Uptake Potential

The Alpine Pearls solution is designed for continuity and scalability. All network members have contributed to its co-design and are now formally committed to adopting the new structure beyond the project, as will be confirmed through the Letters of Commitment and the upcoming General Assembly agreement (Werfenweng, September 2025).

Institutional Embedding & Policy Integration

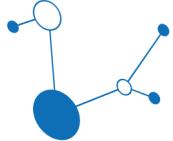
Element	Description
<i>Integration in Strategic Plans</i>	The solution is fully embedded in the Alpine Pearls EGTC Action Plan (validated in early 2025) and is guiding the reallocation of resources, roles, and strategic priorities.
<i>Local Action Plans (LAPs)</i>	Developed using the modular roadmap model, LAPs are aligned with national and regional planning tools (e.g., climate strategies, mobility frameworks), ensuring integration into existing policy frameworks.
<i>Regional Partner Engagement</i>	Partners such as GAL Hermagor, tourism boards, and municipalities are engaging with LAPs and the Academy model to adapt them to their operational contexts.

Replicability Beyond Alpine Pearls

The new EGTC structure and participatory tools have high transferability potential:

- EGTCs and cooperation networks facing similar challenges (fragmentation, low engagement, high costs) can adapt the tested governance model and planning approach.
- Territorial networks in other mountain regions (e.g. the Carpathians) can replicate the Academy and LAPs using their own priorities and capacities.
- The flexible digital platform and project pipeline tool are already open for adaptation, and Alpine Pearls is offering peer-learning opportunities to interested stakeholders.

Long-Term Change and Benefits: anticipated effects of uptake include:

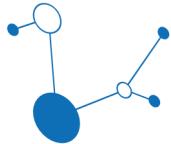


- Institutional transformation: a more agile, member-led EGTC.
- Increased participation: especially of small municipalities, youth groups, and local businesses, leading to a desired network enlargement
- Concrete benefits: improved access to EU funding, visibility, and policy influence for members.
- Sustainability: internal capacities reduce dependency on external consultants and increase resilience.

These effects are already visible in pilot areas and will be solidified through a signed agreement among members, locking in the new model as Alpine Pearls' standard working method.

6. Risk Management Plan

Risk	Impact	Mitigation Measure
1. Internal confusion during the transition to self-managed EGTC	Medium/High	Conduct regular internal reviews; provide targeted training via Alpine Pearls Academy; redistribute tasks clearly with visual role-mapping tools.
2. Uneven engagement among member municipalities	Medium	Use the modular LAP model to accommodate varying capacities; offer 1:1 mentoring to less active members; activate incentives through visibility and funding tools.
3. Lack of technical capacity at local level (e.g. EU projects, strategic planning)	High	Provide practical toolkits and hands-on sessions within the Academy; pair smaller municipalities with experienced partners; external expert support where needed.
4. Limited youth and private sector involvement	Medium	Develop tailored engagement strategies (e.g. digital storytelling, gamified learning); involve young professionals in LAP co-design; collaborate with SMEs through incentive tools (e.g. vouchers).
5. Delays in rollout of new digital and communication tools	Low	Use agile development methods and member feedback loops; engage communication specialists early; test tools in pilot areas before full launch.



6. Misalignment with national or regional policies	Low/Medium	Align LAPs with regional strategies through early stakeholder consultations; maintain dialogue with regional institutions (e.g. tourism boards, GALs).
7. Lack of long-term political support	Medium/High	Secure Letters of Commitment and formal endorsement at the General Assembly; embed solutions into the Action Plan; showcase quick wins to political stakeholders.

7. Post-Project Output Ownership & Durability Checklist

Sustainability Action: Ensuring Continuity and Long-Term Impact

The new lean governance model is now formally embedded in the Alpine Pearls EGTC's Action Plan (validated in early 2025), and guides both the internal organisation and strategic development of the network. Roles have been redistributed, fixed costs reduced, and institutional ownership strengthened. This model will continue to be the EGTC's operational backbone post-project.

Financial Sustainability: Resources and Co-Funding

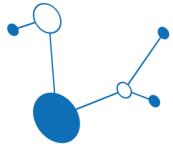
To support long-term implementation, Alpine Pearls has developed a project pipeline and funding matrix that aligns strategic actions with:

- EU funding (e.g. Interreg Central Europe, Italy-Austria, Creative Europe, LIFE, Erasmus+),
- National/regional funds (e.g. regional climate plans, tourism funds, rural development programmes),
- Membership contributions, including optional service-based models (e.g. communication, training),
- Future partnerships with private sponsors or foundations.

The matrix is fed by inputs from members and external experts, ensuring relevance and adaptability over time.

Knowledge Sustainability: Platforms and Tools

- The Alpine Pearls Academy remains a key tool for capacity building, offering regular training cycles and facilitating peer learning among municipalities, even after the project ends.
- The digital platform ensures institutional memory, open access to planning resources, and ongoing stakeholder interaction (internal and public-facing sections).



These tools are integrated into the EGTC's communication and planning processes and are already used independently by several members.

Institutional Anchoring and Network Integration

Alpine Pearls has formalised cooperation links with:

- Regional actors (e.g. GAL Hermagor, tourism agencies),
- European networks such as the Alpine Convention, TourCert, and Carpathian Euroregion,
- Academic institutions (e.g. Politecnico di Torino) to support ongoing knowledge transfer and joint project development.

Local Continuity Mechanisms

- Local core teams, activated during the pilot in Bohinj, Weissensee, Alta Valle Arroscia and others, will continue to act as decentralised facilitators for LAP implementation and EU project participation.
- Participatory mechanisms (e.g. local workshops, bilateral calls, stakeholder mapping) are being institutionalised and will be applied to future projects.

Ultimately, Alpine Pearls is scaling the pilot's achievements, converting short-term measures into enduring frameworks supported by robust funding streams and anchored in local and transnational commitment.