

Caroline PERRIN

Switzerland in the Alpine Space Programme, 2014–2020

Interview with Sébastien Rieben, Swiss Alpine Space contact point and employee of ARE, the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development

The Alpine Space Programme is one of the two Interreg B programmes that Switzerland is participating in. The aim of the Alpine Space Programme is to strengthen transnational cooperation in the Alpine region. Alpine Space Programme project partners can benefit from exchanging knowledge and experience in a large network, building partnerships and developing approaches to solutions for their own region and area of activity. Sébastien Rieben, the Swiss Alpine Space contact point, speaks about the Swiss participation in this programme.



Figure 1: Sébastien Rieben

– What is the role of ARE, the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development, within the Alpine Space Programme?

“At programme level, the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) represents Switzerland in the Programme Committee. At the national level, the ARE acts as a contact point for project partners and with all stakeholders, offering advice, communicating programme news and negotiating national co-funding.”

– How is participating in the Alpine Space Programme significant for Switzerland?

“Switzerland is very active in European territorial cooperation, participating in no fewer than ten different cooperation programmes. Participating in the Alpine Space Programme is very important for Switzerland because it makes it possible to deal with Alpine issues such as transit or climate change with other relevant stakeholders. The economic dimension is also crucial for Switzerland because the programme allows our clusters and SMEs to cooperate with actors in other highly innovative European regions.”

– It’s a long way from the first idea until the official start of the project. What pitfalls have you seen and what you can recommend to other applicants?

“It may sounds obvious, but the applicants must read the terms of reference carefully and be sure to understand what the programme committee expects from them. All applicants should also ask themselves whether their project is truly transnational, or whether it instead consists of a collection of local projects that could be supported by national or regional funding instruments. It’s also important to understand what the Alpine Space Programme is not. For instance, the programme isn’t a research programme, even if research is of course part of most projects. Finally, there are contact points in all partner countries who’d be happy to answer the applicants’ questions. Please use this opportunity!”

– Do you think participating in these projects may impact developments in the regions participating?

“Yes, of course. The importance given by the programme to the impact of projects on the policy cycle has increased in recent years, and this trend will continue in the next programming period. In Switzerland, for instance, we’ve seen that Alpine Space projects have pushed some regions to deal with issues that weren’t specifically tackled before, such as demographic change. Moreover, some activities launched in the IIIB period (2000–2006) are still in place, and they’re proving to be valuable parts of certain regional sectorial policies.”

– What do you expect with regard to the next programming period?

“The programme has set clear objectives and of course I’m confident that excellent projects will be developed in all four priorities. From a personal point of view, I’m particularly curious to see which projects will be developed under the priority ‘Low Carbon Alps’ because energy has a much more important place in the programme than in the previous period. The fourth priority on governance, which is a new topic for the programme and which is partly linked to the future Macroe-regional Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), will also be really interesting.”

– I’d like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Sébastien Rieben and ARE, the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development, for the opportunity to carry out this interview and for their support for the SPHERA project.

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