



professionalising  
networking activities  
in rural areas to ensure  
development of attractive  
job opportunities

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## Lombardy Region Action Plan

June 2019

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## Executive summary

In **The P-IRIS project was born** for addressing the specific needs of inner areas for enhancing their competitiveness and their potential in terms of innovation and attractiveness. In fact, in many parts of Europe young people are leaving rural areas because they do not find jobs answering their professional aspirations. There is therefore a need to boost innovation in these areas in order to develop knowledge-based or creative businesses, offering attractive jobs for well-educated and creative young people.

Management of innovation tools must not copy lessons and solutions from metropolitan areas but be adapted to the specific features of rural innovation systems, which are characterised by asymmetric relations and uneven resources between public, R&D and SMEs actors, and by shortage of scientific disciplines.

The overall objective of P-IRIS is to improve policies related to 3H / 4H cooperation in rural innovation systems, increasing the number of SMEs in innovative networks and the number of innovation projects including R&D. It is also an ambition to improve the skills of public authorities & support systems as managers and mentors of 3H or 4H networks, and the use of related innovation tools.

That's why the P-IRIS partners, from Norway, Finland, Slovenia, Croatia, Italy and Spain, identified a specific rural or mountain region/area in their own country as case-study for the project. In those areas, Valle Camonica (Brescia Province) for Italy, the project partners studied the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the economic and territorial assets, and mapped the main triple/quadruple helix stakeholders, their roles and cooperation skills and/or needs.

Along with this, the most important networks identified and some best practices of each region have been shared with partners through a profitable exchange, especially during the study visits.

On the basis of what we've learnt in the Valle Camonica case study and during the interregional learning process, we've created this action plan aimed to improve policies related to 3H / 4H cooperation in rural innovation systems, not only in Valle Camonica but in all Lombardy Region.

Here we have identified some actions that will be applied in Lombardy Region and will act on the policy instrument identified as fundamental to strengthen the potentialities and competitiveness of the Lombardy inner areas, i.e. the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 managed at regional level. Since the possibilities to act on ROP ERDF 2014-2020 were quite limited, we also enacted an action on a different policy tool, SIMPLER.

The action plan written at the end of the first part of the P-IRIS project (Jan 2017 – June 2019) will become active and will be monitored during the second (and final) part of the project (July 2019 - June 2021).

Part I – General information, high-level information and a brief description of P-IRIS project are provided.

In **Part II – Policy context**, the European Territorial Cooperation programme impacted by the project is described with particular focus on Axis 3, its results and its effective grip on inner areas.

In

**Part III – Details of the actions envisaged in this plan:**

- **ACTION 1 – Criteria for two calls of Axis 3 - ROP ERDF 2014-2020:** influencing two of the last calls of Lombardy ROP ERDF 2014-2020, Axis 3 (PMI competitiveness) in terms of support to inner areas.
- **ACTION 2 –:** SIMPLER is the access point for Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna regions to Enterprise Europe Network, the most important European business support network, and its services in Valle Camonica could foster innovation, internationalization and business competitiveness
- **ACTION 3 – Suggestions to improve support to the inner areas in the present and next ROP ERDF:** for influencing the final phase of current Lombardy Region Operational Program ERDF 2014-2020 and next Lombardy Region Operational Program ERDF 2021-2027, in order to boost inner, rural or mountain, areas innovation and development.

For each action, we provided a description of:

- 1 **Background**, highlighting the lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of the action.
- 2 **Action details**, describing technical and operational aspects for the action.
- 3 **Players involved**, indicating stakeholders, actors, and organisations involved in the development and implementation of the action.
- 4 **Timeframe**, providing the estimated timeframe for the implementation of the action.
- 5 **Costs and funding sources**, providing an estimate of the budget needed for the implementation of the action and, when possible, a description of possible funding sources that could support the action during the time.
- 6 **Expected results**, providing the main qualitative and quantitative indicators measuring the effects of the action.

In

**Part IV – Monitoring** phase, the monitoring phase is drafted, providing a list of expected results and performance indicators for assessing the effectiveness of each action described in Part III.

Finally, **Part V – Conclusions** about the action plan.

## Introduction

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## Part I – General information

**Project:** Interreg Europe P-IRIS - *Policies to improve rural areas' innovation systems by professionalizing networking activities and use of innovation tools*

**Project description:** The Interreg Europe P-IRIS project aims at improving policies supporting innovation in rural areas in six European countries (Croatia, Finland, Italy, Norway, Slovenia, Spain). In each country, the project has identified a pilot area in a rural zone. By improving innovation policies and by mutual learning among partners, the objective of the project is to stimulate innovation in the main economic sectors of the pilot areas, in order to counter depopulation and the flight of younger generations.

A 3-step interregional learning process has been applied:

- Mapping challenges & opportunities of managing 3H or 4H cooperation in rural innovation systems.
- Exchange experience in thematic seminars and demonstrate potential good practice in study visits.
- Prepare regional action plans.

**Partner organisation:** Poliedra - Politecnico di Milano

Poliedra, a consortium of the Politecnico di Milano, is the territorial partner in Lombardy (Italy).

Poliedra participated in the project exchange activities, organized all local and regional working groups in the Valle Camonica area and supported Lombardy Region in designing and finalizing a regional Action Plan on innovation in non-urban areas.



**Endorsement of the Regional Government:** Lombardy Region

The regional government provided a letter of support signed by the Managing Authority of ROP ERDF 2014-2020, that is the policy instrument addressed by the project.



Within the first phase of the P-IRIS project the Managing Authority of ERDF ROP participated in the regional stakeholder groups and in some of the study visits. This learning process allowed to identify the actions aimed at improving the policy instrument targeted by the project. In the second phase the Managing Authority of ROP ERDF will provide data for monitoring the implementation of the Action plan.

**Other partner organisations involved:** N.A.

**Country:** Italy

**NUTS2 region:** ITC4

**Contact person:** Simona Muratori

email address: [simona.muratori@polimi.it](mailto:simona.muratori@polimi.it)

phone number: +39 02 2399 2908

## Part II – Policy context

- The Action Plan aims to impact:
- Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
  - European Territorial Cooperation programme
  - Other regional development policy instrument

The two Policy Instruments addressed are ROP ERDF 2014-2020 as foreseen (Actions 1 and 3) and SIMPLER (Action 2).

### ROP ERDF Lombardia 2014-2020

Lombardy's ROP ERDF 2014-2020 supports the strengthening of research, technological development and innovation (Thematic objective 1 – Priority Axis 1), also as a driver of business competitiveness (Thematic objective 3 – Priority Axis 3) and the development of marginal areas (Thematic objective 6 – Priority Axis 6).

The program addresses the whole of Lombardy (23800 km<sup>2</sup>, about 10 million inhabitants) and its implementation is now at an advanced stage.

Axis 1 - *Research Development Innovation* has a financial allocation of approximately 349 M€ (36.00% compared to the total ROP resources) with the main purpose to reduce the gap with the Europe 2020 Strategy target in terms of R&D spending on GDP. Central elements are the themes of research, development and innovation (R & S & I), within the framework of the regional Smart Specialization Strategy for research and innovation (Strategy S3).

Axis 1 supports the Lombard R&I system by enhancing areas, technological domains and regional excellence and encouraging technology transfer mechanisms to create positive externalities on the entrepreneurial system. The resources assigned are commensurate with the Program's objective of reducing, in the 2014-2020 period, the gap with the Europe 2020 Strategy target in terms of R&D spending on GDP.

Actions included in Priority Axis 1 aim at:

- promoting innovation in SMEs;
- fostering research and development collaborative activities among R&D and innovation centres;
- supporting networks and synergies among enterprises and between enterprises and research system;
- nurturing R&D and innovation demand by Public Sector.

Axis 3 - *Competitiveness* has a financial allocation of approximately 295 M€ (30.06% compared to the total ROP resources), with the main purpose of improving the competitiveness of companies, from birth and throughout the process of growth and consolidation.

Axis 3 supports the activities of small and medium-sized enterprises, with particular attention to improving access to credit, enhancing tourism and regional attractors.

Actions included in Priority Axis 3 aim at:

- supporting the creation of new businesses;
- promoting the export;
- supporting the development of products and services based on cultural and natural attractions of the territory and on the typical product chains, also through networking;
- supporting the aggregation and integration processes between companies in the creation of an integrated product in tourist destinations;
- supporting the competitiveness of businesses in tourist destinations, through interventions to qualify the offer and product / service, strategic and organizational innovation;
- promoting the access to capital for SMEs.

Axis 6 – *Inner Areas* has a financial allocation of 19 M€ (1.96% compared to the total ROP resources), with the main of purpose to help the implementation of the National Inner Areas Strategy (SNAI), a choral strategy dedicated to territories subject to demographic crisis, geographical isolation and shortcomings in the essential citizenship services (health, mobility, education). Resources dedicated to inner areas are actually more than this, because in Axes 1, 3, and 4, there is an overall quote devoted to inner areas equal to 19 M€ (to be added to those of Axis 6).

Recognizing the importance of the tourism sector as an engine for sustainable local development, the Axis 6 offers Lombard Areas the tools to redefine their tourism offer, in terms of both infrastructure and services. The two actions activated have been:

- Interventions for the protection, enhancement and networking of the cultural heritage in strategic areas in order to consolidate and promote their development process;
- Support for the dissemination of knowledge of the cultural and natural heritage, through the creation of innovative services or systems and the use of advanced technologies.

Data from the past programming period (ROP ERDF 2007-2013) show that nearly the whole amount of the investments in R&D and innovation were directed to main urban centres, such as Milano, Brescia or to their hinterland. There is therefore a need for improving and strengthening R&D and innovations systems in “non-urban” areas, including rural and marginal ones, for a better involvement in 2014-2020 ERDF implementation.

That’s why, our initial idea was to address both Axis 1, 3 and 6 of the instrument.

In particular:

- in the framework of Axis 1 we wanted to boost the R&D&I potential of businesses and production chain in inner areas;
- within Axis 3 we wanted to boost the competitiveness of SMEs and the networking within all the subjects of the triple/quadruple helix;
- under Axis 6 we wanted to support expressing the Valle Camonica potential as an “inner area candidate”, showing a relevant development planning attitude and a robust will in addressing local fragmentation and lock-ins to innovate its economic system.

Unfortunately, since the first meeting we had with the Managing Authority of the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 in March 2017, it became very clear that the program was already outlined and most funds already directed or allocated. The results of the P-IRIS project had no chance to affect them. In particular, Axis 6 had already identified the inner areas to finance, excluding from them Valle Camonica. Axis 1 and 3 were already in advanced stage, and only some residual funds of Axis 3 remained to be allocated.

Therefore, we decided to concentrate our efforts on Axis 3, giving suggestions to the Managing Authority for including in the last calls criteria aimed at favouring the participation of inner areas and their possibilities to be funded (see Action 1).

In order to reap all the benefit of the job done and the lessons learnt during the P-IRIS project, we are collecting all of our suggestions in a document willing to influence and orientate the final implementation phase of ROP ERDF 2014-2020 and next programming period (ROP ERDF 2010-2027). This document analysed the results of the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 with especially focus on inner areas participation, and it will be shared with the Managing Authority both of the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 and the ROP ERDF 2021-2027 (see Action 3).

## SIMPLER

SIMPLER is the access point for Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna to the Enterprise Europe Network. Enterprise Europe Network (<http://een.ec.europa.eu/>) is the largest European network supporting innovation, internationalization and business competitiveness. It is present in over 60 countries with around 600 organizations grouped together in consortia.



SIMPLER is supported by the European Commission, the Lombardy Region and the Emilia-Romagna Region. SIMPLER services are free and are aimed primarily at companies, particularly SMEs, their associations, public and private research centers, universities, public bodies.

SIMPLER is managed by a consortium of 12 partners.



Figure 1: SIMPLER partners

SIMPLER offers:

- Support for innovation, internationalization and technology transfer
- Aid in search for international partners for research, technology transfer or commercial collaborations
- Support to SMEs in developing innovation management skills
- Support for the protection and enhancement of research results
- Assistance for participation in Horizon 2020 and other European programs
- Support for access to credit and risk capital
- Specialized consultancy on market opportunities, on European legislation and on policies relevant to companies
- Detection of company feedback on EU policies of interest to them.

SIMPLER is coordinated by **Finlombarda**, a financial company totally participated by Lombardy Region.

In our meetings with the Managing Authority and Lombardy Region officers, we were suggested possible synergies between SIMPLER and the P-IRIS project. We mapped SIMPLER as a good practice, although its use in peripheral areas, despite its high potential, is quite limited. During P-IRIS learning process we got inspired about how to make SIMPLER services more available to peripheral areas, and we designed Acton 2 (see in the following the description of Action 2).

## Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

### ACTION 1 – Criteria for two calls of Axis 3 - ROP ERDF 2014-2020

#### 1. The background

Data from the past programming period (ROP ERDF 2007-2013) show that nearly the whole amount of the investments in R&D and innovation were directed to main urban centres, such as Milano, Brescia or to their hinterland. There is therefore a need for improving and strengthening R&D and innovation systems and their competitiveness in “non-urban” areas, including rural and marginal ones, for a better involvement in 2014-2020 ERDF implementation.

In particular, the Regional Stakeholder Group in Valle Camonica, during its meeting, highlighted the potential for innovation and development in the **agri-food, tourism, promotion of the territory, craftsmanship and creativity sectors**. These sectors, which have strong relationships and interdependencies with one another, should therefore be boosted and encouraged by regional funds in order to increase their competitiveness and their capacity to create successful networks of cooperation.

We saw that also in other inner areas the same sectors are boosted as crucial for the networks' development and innovation. In details, some lessons derive from the Norway, Spanish and Finland experiences.

Concerning **agri-food**, in Norway, **LærdalGrønt** (LG) produces fruits and vegetables, taking care of packing, marketing, market development and sales. LG has a strategy of making their members interact with suppliers and producers in other foreign regions. The purposes of these travels is to gain knowledge from other practices, and get inspiration to new innovative projects in Lærdal. They also engage in innovation projects in which members can take part. They are constantly on the look-out for larger “radical” innovations. They receive external assistance primarily from NjøsNæringsutvikling (NNU). One of the LG's areas of expertise is production of cherries. During their frequent seminars to foreign production facilitates (or similar), they experienced that cherry production and apricot production was located in the same regions. They then hired the necessary competency from UK in order to test apricot production in Lærdal. The apricot production is an ongoing project, and LG hopes to lift the production up to a commercial scale.

#### Lærdal Green



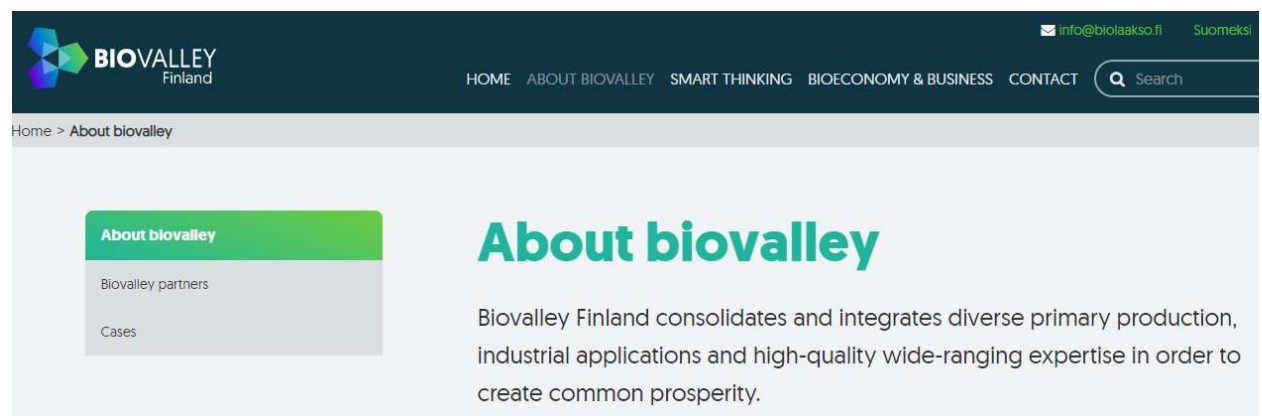
Figure 2: LærdalGrønt case study, Norway

The **Valley of Caderechas**, in the northwest of the region of La Bureba in the province of Burgos, is distinguished from the rest of the region due to its particular orography, its microclimate and its vegetation. The Caderechas Valley is traditionally known for the quality of its fruit. In this environment, in 2001 the association of producers and traders “**Las Caderechas**” emerged as a non-profit association to serve the Valley. The type of service offered is the training to the producers and management of the production of its fruits, mainly cherries, which have a guarantee mark. The Association of producers and traders Las Caderechas serves as a link between producers and traders of fruit, R & D centers and public entities in the region.

From the point of view of **tourism**, some good lessons came from the **Spanish association of Rural Tourism of the Province of Burgos (TURALBUR)**, that approaches the users of Rural Tourism, making establishments, services and activities that are offered in the different regions known. The association in itself has been a success for a touristic territory where it’s very difficult to collaborate in a network.

The **EMBLA network** in Norway has been a good example for improving **tourism** in the inner area of Flaam, Aurland Municipality in rural Norway. The networking of service companies in the territory has overcome the phase of no-cooperation, realised the benefits of working together, started sharing resources and achieved lower costs allowing sustainable extension of the season. EMBLA already shows increased turnover and lower costs.

From the point of view of **valorisation of the territory and its natural resources**, we have been inspired by the **Biovalley** experience, in **Finland**.



*Figure 3: Biovalley webportal, Norway*

Biovalley started as a project in 2013, aiming to develop a network for the natural resource sector operators in Central Ostrobothnia, a very small area and it was important to have cooperation to save resources and finances. Even though the main focus of the network is not in business but in education and research, Biovalley works directly for the local and national companies and start-ups. The network is a good example of public and non-public actors working to develop an area by assisting businesses and business development. This is extremely important in an area, where distances between actors can be long and collaboration is essential for the actors to survive and flourish. The network works actively to boost innovation in its area, providing people with possibilities in education, research and support for businesses in the field of **natural resources**.

The strategy is stated in the regional strategy and the network has good relations with external actors, with the Ministry of agriculture and forestry being an external member.

## 2. Action details

The action will influence, according to the outputs of P-Iris project, two calls of Lombardy Region Operational Program ERDF 2014-2020, Axis 3 (PMI competitiveness), allocating the residual funds. The

calls address the needs of two inner areas, in particular regarding start-ups. The action concerns the formulation of the evaluation criteria of the call, to support the entrepreneurship oriented towards an innovation linked to:

- green economy, circular economy, energy and resource efficiency, and reduction of the environmental impacts of production processes (waste and emissions),
- sustainable management of the **tourism**, integrated enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage, together with the promotion of the local artisanal capacities,
- preservation of the **identity of the landscape and the cultural heritage**, even though maintaining the **typical food production**,
- rehabilitation of building heritage from the environmental point of view (energy efficiency and renewable sources; green building and certified materials).

Furthermore, rewarding criteria for young entrepreneurs (age less than 35 years old) have been inserted in the calls.

The action has already started, with the first two resolutions by the Regional Committee published in March (DGR n. XI/1433 del 25/03/2019) and April 2019 (DGR n. XI/1504 del 08/04/2019),



### 3. Premialità:

*Ricadute esterne positive per gli utenti attraverso l'introduzione di prodotti e servizi che garantiscano un impatto sociale positivo sul territorio:*

- Introduzione di prodotti e servizi che rimandino ad un'idea imprenditoriale orientata ad almeno uno di questi aspetti:
  - l'innovazione connessa all'economia verde, all'economia circolare, ai processi produttivi e/o gestionali basati sull'efficientamento dell'uso di energia e risorse naturali e sulla riduzione degli impatti ambientali (rifiuti, emissioni);
  - la promozione e gestione integrata e sostenibile del turismo e di eventi/ manifestazioni culturali, l'innovazione legata all'interpretazione, educazione e valorizzazione del patrimonio artistico, artigianale e ambientale;
  - la salvaguardia degli elementi identitari del paesaggio e del patrimonio culturale materiale e immateriale, anche con riferimento a produzioni agroalimentari derivanti da filiere biologiche e valorizzanti il binomio prodotto - paesaggio, filiere bio-energetiche;
  - la riqualificazione del patrimonio edilizio dal punto di vista ambientale (efficienza energetica ed energie rinnovabili; bioedilizia e materiali certificati);

### *Collegamento con il percorso garanzia giovani:*

- Realizzazione di prodotti e servizi attraverso l'impiego di giovani (età inferiore ai 35 anni alla data del 31/12/2018) o donne, neoassunti;
- Titolarità femminile dell'impresa secondo quanto previsto dalla Legge 25.2.1992 n. 15
- Titolarità giovanile dell'impresa (avviata da under 35 anni).

**Figure 4: Criteria inserted in the two mentioned resolutions of Lombardy Region**

The criteria regarding green and circular economy and the environmental impact are related to the very popular themes, currently boosted by EU policies and addressed by current regional specific experiences as Circular Economy Regional Observatory and Interreg Europe project CircE (to which we contributed).

### **3. Players involved**

The Managing Authority of ROP ERDF 2014-2020, and in particular the responsible of Axis 3, will be involved in the implementation of the action. In particular, the responsible of the calls is in charge to introduce and detail the evaluation criteria.

### **4. Timeframe**

The calls will be formulated following the general directions defined by the Regional Committee Resolutions published in March (DGR n. XI/1433 del 25/03/2019) and April 2019 (DGR n. XI/1504 del 08/04/2019) and published in July 2019. Funds will be assigned by the end of 2019.

### **5. Costs and funding sources**

The action will be funded with the resources of Axis 3 of ROP ERDF 2014-2020. The above mentioned Resolutions define the financial allocation of both calls as equal to 1.650.000 €.

### **6. Expected results**

The expected result is an increase in the number of innovative enterprises in inner areas thanks to the calls support.

## ACTION 2 – Increasing the capacity of Simpler to reach inner areas

### 1. The background

Because of their natural specificity and traditional values, inner areas have high development potential but, unfortunately, not sufficiently utilized. This is a consequence of restrictive situational circumstances, such as: spatial dislocation and isolation, lack of management capacity, lack of knowledge adjusted to the specific development needs, lack of technology readiness, insufficient infrastructures, concentration of knowledge and customers in urban areas, etc.

The relatively small innovation capability of inner areas is in most cases also strongly related to the low degree of cooperation between the public, educational, scientific and entrepreneurial sectors in terms of designing and implementing appropriate development projects and innovations in rural areas.

The potential of SIMPLER, described above, to support innovation in inner areas is quite evident, but it is a tool substantially unknown in such areas, and that furthermore in those areas tends to stir up resistances, as we could verify in Valle Camonica.

In the framework of the mutual learning process amongst P-IRIS partners, we got inspired by the interesting dialogue with Susana Cámara, the director of the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) of the University of Burgos, which pointed out that an active attitude is necessary to reach the companies and propose them innovative solutions. The TTO has, for instance, specific personnel (transference brokers) in charge of visiting the companies of the Province, picking up their specific needs in terms of R&D and proposing them possible solutions available at the University or tailored based on their needs.

In analogy with this, we planned, together with Finlombarda, to test an active approach in Valle Camonica to link the needs of the companies with the knowledge and tools already existing (SIMPLER), tailoring them on their needs.

In order to reach the local entrepreneurs, we got the cooperation of **Assocamuna**, an Association representing Enterprises in Valle Camonica.

### 2. Action details

The action consists of testing in Valle Camonica an active approach to make SIMPLER known and used in inner areas. With the support of Assocamuna, two meetings will be organised, possibly in the fall of 2019, presenting SIMPLER to the entrepreneurs of the valley. The two meetings will be held in two different areas of the Valley, the high and the low valley, and tailored on the needs of the two areas. Generally speaking, the high valley is more focussed on the forest-wood-energy chain, while the low valley is more oriented toward touristic activities.

We expect to see a growth in the number of entrepreneurs asking for SIMPLER services and using them successfully, in particular to build triple helix partnerships and access European programs and the ROP ERDF. Based on the results obtained, SIMPLER will understand the effectiveness of actions of this kind and how to replicate them to address the specific needs of all the Lombardy inner areas.

Assocamuna is giving to Finlombarda information about the existing productive activities in the valley and will organize the events, assuring the promotion and communication of the initiative.

The action started with a first virtual meeting between Assocamuna and Finlombarda, organized by Poliedra on 31/05/2019.

### 3. Players involved

The involved subjects are:

- Finlombarda Spa - Finanziaria per lo Sviluppo della Lombardia S.p.A. - a financial company, totally participated by Lombardy Region, whose institutional task is to support regional policies for the economic and social development of the Lombardy territory, enterprises, the governmental authority and the citizen, through financial and management tools and initiatives. Finlombarda manages dedicated regional and European funds in order to promote the competitiveness, the growth, the innovation, the co-operation and the internationalization of Lombardy's entrepreneurship. Finlombarda coordinates SIMPLER under its institutional task of contributing to the implementation of regional economic, social and territorial development programs.
- Assocamuna, an Association representing Enterprises, founded in December 1995 by Luigi Buzzi and a group of entrepreneurs of Valle Camonica, in order to represent the business sector in the Valley. Its mission is to contribute to economic and social development of the territory, supporting the growth of the different entrepreneurial realities and offering high added value services to profit and non-profit companies, local public bodies, workers and unemployed people. The Association stands out for its strong bond with the territory, which sees it engaged in important enhancement and promotion actions and, at the same time, for the attention and interest towards the challenges and opportunities of a constantly evolving global landscape. Assocamuna provides information about entrepreneurship in the Valley and in order to enable Finlombarda to tailor the meetings on the specific needs of the Valley. Assocamuna will be in charge of organising and advertising the meetings.
- Poliedra as the subject facilitating the dialogue between the two subjects and monitoring the success of the action in the next two years.

#### **4. Timeframe**

The test action should be implemented in the second half of 2019. Assocamuna and Finlombarda are still defining the details, but the first meeting presenting SIMPLER opportunities for the valley entrepreneurs should take place on September or October 2019.

#### **5. Costs and funding sources**

The action is included in the SIMPLER and ASSOCAMUNA services for enterprises, so it will not have extra costs. In terms of working days, the effort could be estimated with a total of 20 man-days

#### **6. Expected results**

We expect to see a growth in the number of entrepreneurs asking for SIMPLER services and using them successfully, in particular to build triple helix partnerships and access European programs and the ROP ERDF. Based on the results obtained, SIMPLER will understand the effectiveness of actions of this kind and how to replicate them to address the specific needs of all the Lombardy inner areas.

In the long term, the test action in Valle Camonica will lead to a higher capacity of SIMPLER to support innovation in inner areas.

## ACTION 3 – Suggestions to improve support to the inner areas in the present and next ROP ERDF

### 1. The background

Lombardy Region selected some inner, i.e. marginal, areas (Valchiavenna, Alto Lario, Alta Valtellina, Oltrepo Pavese) as those that need more support, and therefore allocated resources specifically for them within the Axis 3 and 6 to support the start-up of new enterprises, to boost their competitiveness, with special regard of touristic sector. Other instruments implemented in the past, devoted to the preservation, management and promotion of the local heritage without specific attention to enterprises innovation, had shown low capacity to contrast the negative dynamics of the economy in rural and mountain areas.

The analysis of the funds provided by ROP ERDF 2014-2020 (source: SiAge Lombardy Region data processed by Poliedra) highlights that they have been able to support only partially the projects of inner areas, and mostly for the strategy of Axis 4 (CO2 reduction). The funded projects were focused on the improvement of the competitiveness of the companies, and less on research and innovation processes. Most of the projects developed in inner areas concerned the touristic sector and in particular the retraining of facilities.

Furthermore, few realities in the internal areas succeeded in building projects in partnership; however, some examples of cooperation have confirmed an ability to network mainly in relation to the promotion of territories and the local cultural heritage and, again, of tourist accommodation.

The distribution of the resources assigned by the implementation tools of Axes I and III of the 2014-2020 ERDF ROP in the period January 2014-February 2019 (Figure 1) shows that the municipalities that have activated a greater number of loans are the central areas (87%), while the internal areas have received a lower amount (13%). Furthermore, if calls addressed to the Valchiavenna inner area are excluded from the comparison, the gap between inner areas and centers moderately worsens. This distribution of resources is at least in part attributable to the distribution of economic activities; in fact, 9% of Lombardy businesses are located in inner areas, where 7% of the employed population work - against a resident population of 11% (ISTAT 2011).

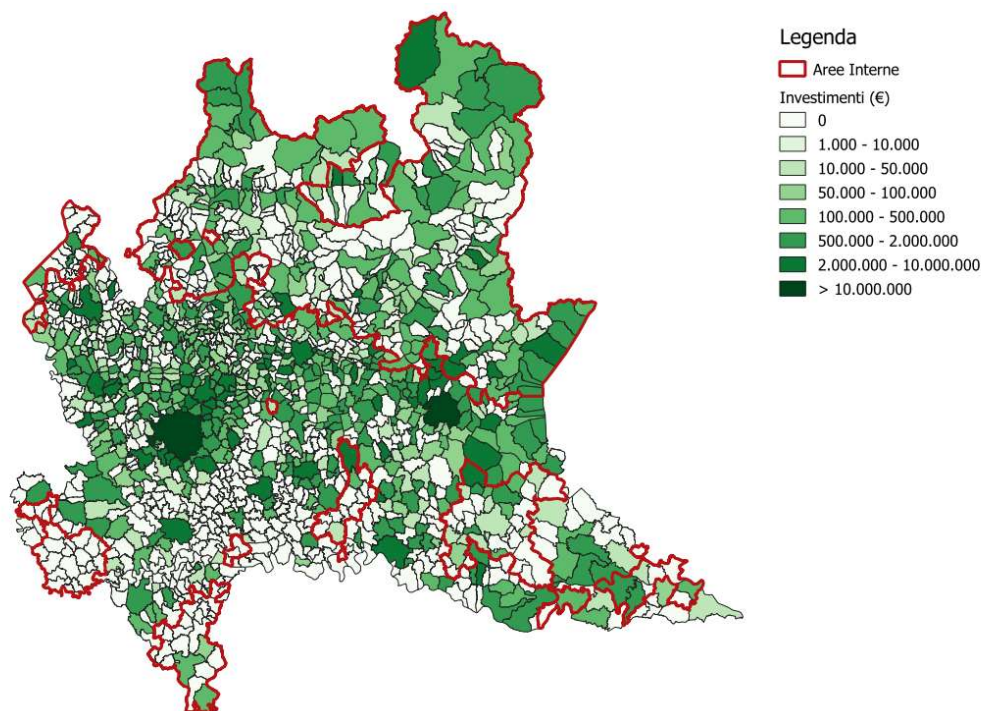


Figure 5 - Total investments (€) activated in each municipality through the projects of axes I & III of ROP ERDF 2014-20



Furthermore, we highlight that:

**1. Participation of inner areas' stakeholders is poor and partial (except in the case of specific and dedicated tools) and regards almost exclusively enterprises. Cooperation is very often lacking.**

This phenomenon could have several reasons:

- Poor information on opportunities and/or lack of proactivity
- Poor design capacity and leaning for innovation
- Poor competitiveness in high-profile innovation projects

**2. The tourism sector attracts investments in inner Areas, due to:**

- High requalification needs for the buildings, infrastructure and equipment used for receptivity purposes
- Axis VI-Inner Areas strategies move the allocation of funds in that sector

**3. Inner areas partnerships show similar needs, i.e.:**

- Promotion of traditional local heritage, but through innovative tools
- Aid of complementary and specialist professionals
- Presence of coordination managers in the tourist offer

Among the **good practices** funded so far on the topic of mountain tourism, the interest in an overall vision of revival of traditional touristic activities and promotion of cultural and natural heritage prevails, supported by new technologies and innovative communication and information tools, with a special regard in sustainable development. This strategy can be a response to development problems also for many other inner areas that have not yet been funded by the ROP ERDF.

To enforce this kind of processes in these areas it's necessary, on the one hand, a path of coaching by experts, on the other hand, the formation of professional skills for coordination, acting as a glue between triple or quadruple helix subjects, specialized on the issues of conservation and protection of heritage, environmental and social sustainability, ICT, etc.

## 2. Action details

The action will be developed in two phases: the first one regards the involvement of the Managing Authority of the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 in the critical analysis of the results of the funds already assigned in regional inner areas in order to influence the residual instruments of the ROP ERDF 2014-2020.

Then, also on the basis of this exchange, we will formulate specific suggestions for the next programming period (2021-2027) focused on the support to cooperation and innovation of the inner areas' stakeholders.

With this action, on the basis of the:

- the knowledge of the Valle Camonica situation and the interaction with local and regional stakeholders;
- the analysis of the data of the projects funded till now by ROP ERDF 2014-2020, Axis 1 and 3;
- the lessons learnt from best practices shared within P-Iris' partners,

the AP would like to boost the:

- Implementation of instruments focussed on innovation in rural areas, in close cooperation with the Managing Authority, coherently with the thematic objectives selected by Lombardy Region.
- Introduction of criteria for the selection of project proposals presented on calls or other implementing instruments that will be published within the new programming period. The criteria will be designed to favour eco-innovation in tourism, agri-food, natural heritage sectors, green/circular economy, strong partnership in the triple/quadruple helix, involvement of young people and women, etc. (see also Action 1).

### **3. Players involved**

Managing Authority of ROP ERDF 2014-2020 and, through its intermediation, the responsible of the new ROP ERDF 2021-2027.

### **4. Timeframe**

The process has already started within the P-IRIS project, as the right framework to start a cooperation with Lombardy Region, as supporter but also as the Managing Authority of ROP ERDF funds. In fact, Poliedra has arranged many formal and informal meetings since the beginning of P-IRIS project, in order to involve Lombardy Region and sensitize it about the inner areas, and in specific Valle Camonica, needs.

In May 2019, the interaction with the Managing Authority of ROP ERDF 2014-2020 regarded specifically the results of the program, as the first concrete step of the application of the action. The first meeting was held on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019 and it had the scope to analyse the quantitative and qualitative results of the program with regards to inner areas. The second implementation step timeframe cannot be defined now, because it depends on the timeframe of the drafting activities of ROP ERDF 2021-2027.

### **5. Costs and funding sources**

The personnel of Lombardy Region will work at this action as part of their Institutional activities, implying no extra costs. In terms of working days of personnel employed in Lombardy Region, the effort is estimated in 20 man/days.

### **6. Expected results**

The quantitative result will be increase in the number of innovative enterprises supported in inner areas in the ROP ERDF 2014-2020. The second one is the improvement of the ROP ERDF 2021-2027 capacity to support cooperation and innovation of the inner areas' stakeholders. In the long term we expect to have (after the end of P-IRIS project): more subjects of the triple/quadruple helix participating to the calls of the new program, more capacity to address the specificities of the calls in cooperation with the other subjects, more money invested in inner areas projects and new jobs created.

## Part IV – Monitoring phase

The overall objective of P-IRIS is to stimulate innovation in the main economic sectors of the pilot areas, in order to counter depopulation and the flight of younger generations. In particular, the P-IRIS partnership has decided to focus on knowledge intensive businesses, businesses based on creative skills or businesses based on “eco innovation” (including adventure tourism).

The progress and the effectiveness in addressing each action of this action plan will be monitored through a light but effective **monitoring system**, conceived to include specific, measurable, and realistic performance **indicators**.

A first list of **performance indicators** is presented in Table 1, which includes, for each action, a sum-up of expected results and timeframe of the monitoring phase.

*Table 1 – RAP Monitoring system*

Action	Expected results	Timeframe	Performance indicators
<b>ACTION 1 – Criteria for two calls of Axis 3 - ROP ERDF 2014-2020</b>	Increase in the number of innovative enterprises in inner areas thanks to the calls support	March-April 2019: resolutions by the Regional Council about the criteria for the two calls July 2019: Calls published December 2019: funds assigned	N. enterprises funded N. projects funded Total investments (M€)
Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata. <b>Increasing the capacity of Simpler to reach inner areas</b>	After the test presentations in Valle Camonica, growth in the number of entrepreneurs asking for SIMPLER services and using them successfully, in particular to build triple helix partnerships and access European programs and the ROP ERDF.  In the long term, the test action in Valcamonica will lead to a higher capacity of SIMPLER to support innovation in inner areas.	Test action: May 2019: start of exchange between Finlombarda and Assocamuna  Fall-Winter 2019: 2 tailored meetings presenting SIMPLER in Valle Camonica  December 2020: final measure of the effects obtained	N. of participants to each of the 2 meetings  N. of enterprises asking for SIMPLER services
<b>ACTION 3 – Suggestions to improve support to the inner areas in the present and next ROP ERDF</b>	Increase in the number of innovative enterprises supported in inner areas in the ROP ERDF 2014-2020  Improve the ROP ERDF 2021-2027 capacity to support cooperation and innovation of the inner areas' stakeholders.	May 2019: first discussion with the MA  End: not foreseen	N° enterprises funded by ROP ERDF 2014-2020  Total investments (M€) assigned to enterprises by ROP ERDF 2014-2020

In the second phase of the project, during the actions implementation, the values of the indicators will be updated regularly.

## Part V – Conclusions

Data from the past programming period (ROP ERDF 2007-2013) show that nearly the whole amount of the investments in R&D and innovation were directed to main urban centres. There is therefore a need for improving and strengthening R&D and innovations systems in “non-urban” areas, including rural and marginal ones, for a better involvement in 2014-2020 ERDF implementation. That’s why our initial idea was to address the instrument in Axis 1 – R&D&I, Axis 3 – Competitiveness and Axis 6 – Inner Areas.

However, when the P-IRIS project started the phase of definition of the Action Plan the program was already outlined and most funds already allocated. The results of the P-IRIS project had no chance to affect them, and we could influence only the allocation of residual funds of the Axis 3 (Action 1).

In order reap the benefit of the job made and the lessons learnt during the P-IRIS project (especially the best practices experimented in other countries), we are sharing with the Managing Authority our analysis on inner areas participation in the ROP ERDF 2014-2020, and we are preparing suggestions for the residual funds of the present program and for the ROP ERDF 2021-2027. The goal is to influence the future funds and boost inner areas for the effective and successful participation (Action 3).

We took the opportunity of the project to also build an action (Action 2) regarding SIMPLER, a policy instrument not directly connected to the ROP ERDF, but quite in line with P-IRIS objectives. Action 2 is devoted to increase the ability of SIMPLER to reach peripheral areas and to tailor its services based on their needs. This Action will be carried out in Valle Camonica with the support of Finlombarda and Assocamuna, and its first effect will be an increase of the ability of the enterprises of the valley to build triple helix partnerships and access European funds.

The qualitative and quantitative results of this action plan will be monitored, through specific indicators, during the second phase of the P-IRIS project (June 2019-June 2021). The most important and effective results will however take place only in the long period: we expect, with the long term contribution of P-IRIS, a rebirthing and new flourishing of Lombardy inner areas, that will finally express their real potential in innovation, cooperation and attractiveness.

Alongside the actions described in this document, Poliedra has started working with the Valle Camonica stakeholders with other initiatives that could be very relevant for the territory. Even if they not directly address the policy instrument we chose, they address the general objective of the P-IRIS project in boosting inner areas’ capacity of innovation and networking. We consider these actions as important “side effects” of P-IRIS.

A first issue is the collaboration of the P-IRIS Local Stakeholder Group with the MAB (Man and the Biosphere) group. The MAB group was born with to obtain the UNESCO certification as *Valle Camonica and Alto Sebino Biosphere Reserve*. Linking these two groups (meeting, document exchange, initiatives, etc.) was very important to share their respective goals for the area and to align, when possible, the territory development strategies. This was also a good example of networking in the quadruple helix, since public institutions, social sector, enterprises and research sectors were all well represented.

Furthermore, in 2017, we started, in collaboration with the S. Anna University of Pisa, a project with wine local producers to test, for the first time, the “Made Green in Italy” certification<sup>1</sup>. This is the Italian certification of the environmental footprint, aimed at giving an innovative way to explain and certify the quality of a product from the point of view of its environmental impact. The implementation of this project could be very relevant

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<sup>1</sup> Italian Ministerial Decree n. 56/2018 “Regolamento per l’attuazione dello schema nazionale volontario per la valutazione e la comunicazione dell’impronta ambientale dei prodotti, denominato «Made Green in Italy», di cui all’articolo 21, comma 1, della legge 28 dicembre 2015, n. 221”

from the point of view of innovation, triple helix networking and young entrepreneurs, as well as to give a competitive advantage to the enterprises that certify their production.

Last but not least local stakeholders, in particular Valle Camonica Mountain Community, manifested us during the meetings connected to P-IRIS their desire to give suggestions not only for the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 but also for the Rural Development Program (RDP) 2014-2020 of Lombardy Region. We collected from them very precise indications about the criteria that in a call could facilitate, or even allow or not, the participation of inner areas subjects. Examples of criteria suggested regard the minimum size of agricultural areas owned by the farm applying for funding, since in inner areas it is generally smaller than in the lowland areas, the matching between innovation and functionality of new agricultural machinery, in relation with the specific characteristics of rural roads (width, slope, and radius of curvature). In this regard, Poliedra is exploring the possibility to interact with the Managing Authority of the RDP, in the framework of its role of support as Environmental Authority of Lombardy Region.

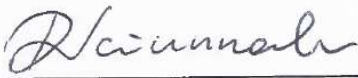
## Signature

The managing Authority of ROP ERDF 2014-2020 of Lombardy Region herewith agrees to support and promote the implementation of the actions detailed in the present Action Plan.

I confirm that I have the required authority of my organization to do so and that the required authorization process of my organization has been duly carried out.

Date: July 11<sup>th</sup> 2019

Name and job Title: Dr. Dario Sciunnach, head of office, MA ERDF ROP  
2014-2020

Signature: 

Stamp of the organisation: Il dirigente  
(Dr. Dario Sciunnach)