



**ALPPS**  
Alpine Public Procurement Services

# Your **key** to public contracts in the Alpine space

**Opening the public sector to SMEs in the Alpine Space**

**Coping with the difficulties encountered by SMEs when tendering abroad**

*Abstract of the SWOT analysis conducted by the ALPPS partners – April 2005*

Alpps is an Interreg IIIB project aiming at facilitating the SMEs access to public procurement in the Alpine Space. The present abstract gives an overview of the actions that were carried out by the partners during the project's life, and some information on the main problems companies face when submitting a bid abroad.

The complete analysis can be downloaded from <http://www.alpps-online.com>



ALPPS is a project partly financed under Interreg IIIB Initiative, Alpine Space programme.

**Interreg IIIB** is a Community initiative which aims to stimulate interregional cooperation in the EU between 2000-2006. It is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

Further details on the Alpine space programme can be found at <http://www.alpinespace.org/>

For further information on structural funds [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/index_en.htm)



**An Interreg IIIB project**

## Context

Although public procurement accounts for more than 16% of the European Union's GDP, cross-border contracts are still rare. This is particularly obvious when we look at the tenders below EU thresholds. However, these low value contracts are often precisely the tenders that are of interest to SMEs, which usually have neither the human nor the technical resources to adapt their strategy to comply with the legislation of every country.

## Objective of the project

The objective of the ALPPS project was therefore to implement solutions **to improve SME's access to public contracts within the Alpine space**. It was also an opportunity, for the partners, to identify the many problems the SMEs encounter when tendering abroad.

## Relevant actions carried out

In total, almost **12'000 tenders were sent to 90 participating pilot companies** during the one year pilot phase. The number of relevant tenders received, and therefore the overall satisfaction with the project, varied considerably from one company to another, but also from region to region. Overall impressions seemed positive since 75 % claimed they would be willing to take part in a project like ALPPS again.

Within the framework of the ALPPS project, some pilot companies seized **the opportunity to submit bids beyond their national borders**, and four of them were even awarded public contracts, contributing to the success of the project. An important facet of the project also consisted in **promoting partnerships** through various approaches : personal contacts, meetings and specific software tools.

The **seminars and workshops** organised by the partners\* were successful : more than 1600 participants attended these seminars, and felt satisfied with the quality of presentations.

A **practical guide**, covering general issues related to public procurement in Europe and in the Alpine regions, can now be downloaded from <http://www.alpps-online.com>.

The **helpdesk activities** mainly focused on questions related to national/regional legislation and administrative or technical barriers.

The project itself was promoted intensely at European, national and regional/local levels.

\* the list of Alpps partners is available in cover page.

# Success Story

## Testimonial Italian company



Mrs Lilli Angela, Carloangela S.r.l.,  
Ivrea (TO)

"I am very glad to express our satisfaction as an enterprise for having been awarded a French tender for furnishing a cafeteria. After reading various tenders very closely, we identified one that was targeted to our activity. We dedicated our entire team - from the designer to the administrative employee, and with the help of the Turin Chamber of commerce - to preparing the application for the tender. Therefore it was with great delight that we received confirmation from the awarding authority that our candidacy had been retained. Now we can face the next tenders with more confidence. Projects such as Alpps will certainly contribute to the growth of our enterprise."

## Testimonial Swiss company



Mr. Dominik Angst, ITV Geomatik AG,  
Regensdorf-Watt

"As a small enterprise that is active both nationally and internationally, it is important for us to find foreign tenders with little effort. In addition to the well-known channels, ALPPS offers us the possibility of learning about foreign sub-threshold tenders without checking all the relevant publications individually."

## Testimonial French company



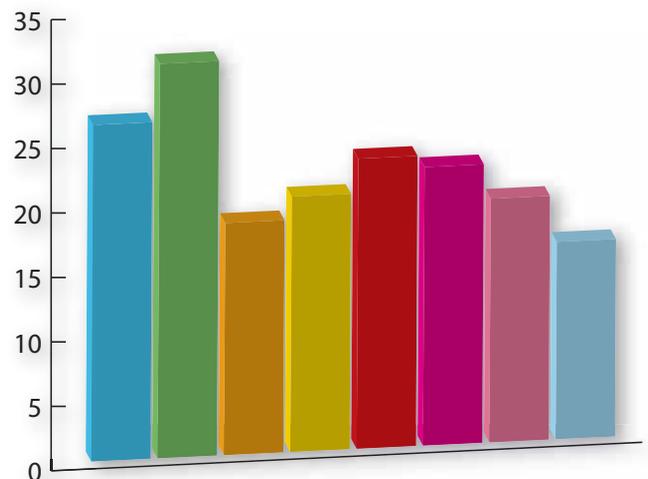
Mr. Alain Gratier, Directeur des marchés,  
OPAC38 (Isère)

"I had great pleasure participating in the match-making event organised by CCI Grenoble and CCI Turin on February 10th, 2005. The sincere and cordial exchanges we had with the Piedmont companies enabled us to evaluate mutual difficulties or misunderstandings with regard to the commercial transactions involved in public tendering. A certain number of opportunities arose, offering short-term prospects for beneficial commercial exchanges."

## Problems the companies face when applying for a tender abroad

When it comes to applying for a public contract beyond national borders, the main problems SMEs are likely to encounter are listed in the graph hereafter (the figure corresponds to the number of times the problem has been mentioned by the pilot companies on the occasion of the final project's evaluation).

- lack of knowledge of the legal framework abroad
- necessity to apply in the language of the tender
- required documentation too complex and different from the one of our country
- difficulty in finding suitable partners in the tendering country
- heavy competition by local companies
- assumption that bids of foreign companies are automatically rejected
- difficult access to publication of foreign public tenders
- systematic technical barriers



### Other points mentioned :

lack of time to prepare the submission in a foreign language, tenders hardly split into job-lots, difficulty in obtaining complementary information from public entities, lack of transparency in the procedures.

# Conclusions and perspectives

## Conclusions and perspectives

The project's innovative approach can not be denied. There really is a lack of information concerning tenders which are published (or not) at local level. If they want to conquer new markets, Alpine companies are compelled to seek better access to Alpine space contracts including public contracts.

SMEs are really interested in a single database that would collect both European and regional tender notices, provided these notices are partly translated in different languages. But today, such a database does not exist. Indeed, the difference between procedures in France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland makes it difficult to harmonize the number and the quality of tenders received by participants. Unless there is a clear legislation at regional and/or national level, making the publication of tenders compulsory on defined journals, competition between alpine companies will remain unfair. In the same way, unless there is a common codification used for the classification of tenders, it will remain difficult to guarantee the matching of selected tenders with company profiles.

Access to information itself is not enough: the many difficulties facing SMEs when applying abroad show us that they also need strong local support from networks such as the Euro Info Centre network. EICs can assist companies in a practical way, and answer any questions related to public procurement regulations in Europe.

Companies are also well aware that the best way to win a contract abroad is to develop a partnership with local partners, mostly because of the language used in tendering. Networks such as the EIC network could help them in this crucial activity, by providing matching services.

We should not forget the role played by public authorities: they should make their procedures more transparent and publish tender notices in well-known media so as to increase company awareness. They should also bear in mind that opening public tenders to foreign bidders could bring advantages such as lower prices or new technologies.

The synergy developed between the different partners regions and their experience in public procurement will surely result in the development of new services for local companies seeking to submit tenders abroad.



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