



CIPRA calling for sustainable measures in response to global warming

“Climate protection must not be permitted to damage the natural environment!”

Climate check for the Alps: A team of scientists representing various disciplines is showing what intelligent climate protection could look like. Their findings are being incorporated in the cc.alps project launched by the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA).

CIPRA’s conclusion: the countries of the Alps must act now to adjust to the consequences of global warming – but only with measures that do mankind and the natural environment more good than harm.

An umbrella organisation representing five million people with an interest in nature protection, wants to move mountains – to be precise, to move the Alps all the way to Copenhagen. There, where Denmark is definitely flat, politicians from all over the world are gathering in December to approve a new agreement to counter global warming. The International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA), as the umbrella for over a hundred environmental protection organisations in the seven countries of the Alps, is determined to show delegates that the impacts of climate change are making themselves felt particularly quickly and drastically in the high mountains of Europe. In a letter addressed to the ministers of the environment of the Alpine countries, CIPRA is calling for the Alps to be put on the Copenhagen agenda as part of both the problem and the solution. At the same time CIPRA is working to make the citizens of all the countries of the Alps more aware of the problem of climate change in the Alps – and offering solutions at the same time (see box).

Dominik Siegrist, President of CIPRA International, points to the fast pace of change in the Alpine landscape: “Today not even the biggest sceptics can fail to see the warning signs: The glaciers are now melting at a faster rate than ever before, the permafrost is starting to thaw, and violent storms and long periods of drought are on the increase.” The mountain landscape is now changing so quickly that many species of flora and fauna can no longer adapt. According to Siegrist, almost every second plant species in the Alps will be threatened by extinction by 2100. It is more than doubtful whether the declared goal of limiting global warming to two degrees can still be achieved. CIPRA is calling on the delegates at the Copenhagen conference to agree on a binding regime for financing the necessary climate change mitigation measures.

The funds required will not only benefit the natural environment; many new jobs can also be created in a variety of sectors including energy supply, nature protection and the transport industry.

CIPRA demands on nature protection

CIPRA put together demands on central topics: energy, nature protection, traffic, building and refurbishing, tourism, spatial planning, natural hazards, agriculture, forestry and water, and energy self-sufficient regions.

www.cipra.org/de/cc.alps/ergebnisse/forderungen

Thinking ahead in climate protection

Construction and housing constitute another area in which Siegrist believes emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO₂) can be significantly reduced in the short term. CIPRA is also calling on national governments and the European Union to introduce ambitious programmes to

fund improvements to public transport, and to restore bogs and woods as effective carbon sinks. “Copenhagen must be the turning point for proactive climate protection,” hopes President Siegrist. The very fact that the countries of the Alps are so strongly affected by the consequences of global warming makes them the ideal choice as a model region for forward-looking climate and environment protection policies. This is the goal pursued by CIPRA with the establishment of its cc.alps project, which was launched two years ago. As an international umbrella organisation, CIPRA is well qualified to handle such an international project, all the more so as it can pool the expertise of scientists from various disciplines. The common goal is “to think ahead one step in climate protection”, as Executive Director Andreas Götz puts it, who is co-ordinating the multidisciplinary research effort from Schaan in Liechtenstein. His team is at work throughout the Alps to determine the ecological and social impacts of the climate protection measures taken.

In such wide-ranging fields as transport, tourism, regional economy, nature protection, spatial planning and energy supply, the researchers are listing the various ways in which the countries of the Alps can now start preparing for the impacts of climate change. “At the moment we are seeing a lot of harmful actionism,” says Götz. The politicians are keen to act quickly, and in the process they often do more harm than good. But the CIPRA climate check serves not only to pillory the errors of short-sighted policymakers but also to spotlight successful models of sustainable climate change mitigation. Municipalities and companies setting a good example are recommended as laudable models (see box).

Exemplary climate measures

The team of cc.alps chose 34 projects, initiatives and activities that are not only good for the climate but also for society, environment and the economy. CIPRA suggests reading them, copying them, passing them on, and improving them!

www.cipra.org/de/cc.alps/ergebnisse/good-practice

The house of the future as a mini power plant

At first sight, switching to a wood-burning heating system would seem to be a positive step. After all, wood is a natural and regenerative fuel. But the increasing use of wood pellets for heating is not without its drawbacks. And Andreas Götz warns: “It does not make sense to clear the forests to heat badly insulated houses.” He has some alarming figures to support his case: While industrial energy consumption has remained more or less unchanged for many years now, in private households it has more than doubled since the 1970s. Most of the energy is used for heating purposes – and largely wasted. That is because most buildings in the Alps are electricity- and oil-guzzlers and in urgent need of rehabilitation. With better insulation and the use of renewable sources of energy, energy consumption in such buildings could be reduced by up to 90 percent relatively easily. “It only makes sense to switch over to a wood-burning heating system,” says Götz, “if the buildings are modernised in terms of energy consumption at the same time.”

According to data collected by CIPRA, more public money is pumped into the construction of new homes in most countries of the Alps than into the rehabilitation of existing houses. For CIPRA, however, an intelligent climate protection policy would produce the opposite result, with public funding made conditional on achieving targets to reduce energy consumption. For Andreas Götz, the basic message to policymakers is clear: “Down with consumption!” And CIPRA’s Executive Director is convinced that today’s technologies already offer great potential for energy savings. Only through a clear reduction in energy demand will it be possible to achieve the official target set at earlier climate conferences, namely to halve carbon emissions by 2020.

CIPRA is convinced that the future lies in buildings that are capable of producing an energy surplus. Apart from optimum insulation, that means they must be designed to ensure that the rooms make the best possible use of solar irradiation. With a photovoltaic array on the roof and a geothermal heat pump system in the cellar, such passive houses can generate more energy than they consume. The necessary technologies are already available. The big advantage of these private mini power plants: climate-neutral generation.

Nature protection as climate protection

Climate protection is bringing new conflicts to the mountains. Hydropower, for example, is a climate-neutral form of energy and it is in abundant supply in the Alps. So what could be more logical than to construct still more hydropower plants in order to satisfy the growing demand for electricity. But there is a downside in the form of the damage done to the natural landscape by the new structures. Scientists working for the cc.alps project have calculated that, by upgrading and refurbishing existing plants, total generating capacity could be increased fourfold in the short term. So here again, “better rather than new” is the motto.

With regard to flooding, CIPRA is offering ways of responding to climate change without detriment to the goals of nature protection. The experts are predicting an increase in major flood events in the Alps as one of the most dangerous consequences of global warming. The usual suggestion for protecting towns and villages from flash floods is to construct control structures along the river banks, i.e. to convert the rivers into concrete canals. “Absolutely wrong!” says Mario Broggi, co-ordinator for the Alps at the MAVA Foundation for Nature, which provides financial support for cc.alps. According to Broggi, the modern approach to protection from flooding is quite different: Rivers must be freed of their straitjackets, and retention areas created on both sides so that a sudden increase in run-off does not trigger a flash flood racing down the valley but leads to inundation of the retention areas. “More space for the Alpine rivers means more space for the natural landscape,” says the ecologist and forester. With such a solution, adaptation to the consequences of climate change goes hand in hand with nature protection.

For Broggi, the restoration of bogs also offers potential for a win-win solution. This type of land is a highly effective sink for the greenhouse gas CO₂. Although bogs represent only three percent of the world’s total area of land, intact bogs account for 30 percent of all CO₂ stored in the soil. When bogs are drained, most of the carbon is released into the atmosphere where it contributes to global warming. Bog restoration has the opposite effect since bogs regain their climatic buffer function. As Mario Broggi puts it, “We want to take advantage of cc.alps to draw attention to the positive natural effects of intelligent climate protection policies.”

Bog restoration is expensive, and liberating the rivers of the Alps from their concrete straitjackets no less so. At the present rate of progress, it would take 300 years to revitalise half of the rivers in Switzerland alone. For CIPRA that is much too long. And President Dominik Siegrist warns: “Time is running out for us.” The international community, he continues, must adopt a much more urgent and energetic approach to climate change mitigation. That applies at the regional level, i.e. to the Alps with their pronounced sensitivity to climatic changes, as well as at the international level. It is time for the “procrastinators”, USA and China, to finally switch to the climate protection course already adopted by the reform-oriented countries. He is convinced that Copenhagen is the last chance “to at least limit the damage for the whole of humanity”.

Please address any queries to:

Andreas Götz, Executive Director CIPRA International, andreas.goetz@cipra.org Tel. +423 237 53 53
Im Bretscha 22, FL-9494 Schaan

For further information, go to www.cipra.org/cc.alps

This press release is available in a long and a short version together with press photos from www.cipra.org/en/press/press-releases/press-release