

## Comprehensive study on mountain areas in Europe

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## Taking the train and bus to the ski slopes proves popular

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The European Commission recently published the results of a study on the economic and social situation of European mountain areas. The study provides an in-depth analysis of mountain areas in 29 countries in Europe, including the EU Member States, the 10 new Member States and Switzerland.

According to the study there are widely differing circumstances applying in mountain areas, although they tend to experience many common challenges linked to low population density, inaccessibility and the relatively high costs of infrastructure provision. By addressing these challenges through well-targeted policies, the Union could contribute to greater territorial cohesion, the study noted. According to the criteria on which the study is based, around 40% of the total land area of the countries concerned is classified as mountain areas in which almost 20% of the total population lives. Around 60% of the total population lives in or near mountain areas. In most of the mountain areas studied depopulation is greater than in low-lying areas. By contrast large areas of the Alps are characterised by a growing population. The study noted that the economy of Europe's mountain regions is subject to considerable diversity. While agriculture and forestry are often perceived as vital in economic terms and for cultural diversity, employment in other sectors is generally higher, particularly in the service sector.

The study also outlines the many existing policy initiatives in this field, such as sector policies, integrated development policies and a variety of trans-national policies and instruments such as the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions. In many mountain areas the new information and communications technologies provide new opportunities for development, and there could be much to gain from the co-ordination and dissemination of experiences between regions and countries.

Source and complete text of the 200 page study in English:

[http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p\\_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/37910|RAPID&lg=EN](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/37910|RAPID&lg=EN) (en)

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## Projects to protect bearded vultures and golden eagles show positive results

The species preservation projects “Golden Eagles in the Eastern Alps” and “Resettlement of Bearded Vultures in the Alps” were presented on 26 March as part of the 16<sup>th</sup> National Park Weeks at the Hohe Tauern National Park in Salzburg/A.

Co-operation between sanctuary administrations in the participating regions is to be intensified with the “Aquilalp.net” project. Under the project golden eagle populations in five protected areas of the eastern Alps are to be co-ordinated and standardised. While golden eagle populations in the Alps are currently stable at around 1200 breeding pairs, the golden eagle is considered potentially endangered as man’s impact can quickly result in a negative trend. Golden eagles make very widespread use of their habitat, which means that the long-term survival of the species can only be ensured through large protected areas and preservation strategies co-ordinated at the supra-national level.

Results so far for the species preservation project for the bearded vulture have also been essentially favourable. More than 100 fledglings have been released throughout the Alps since 1977.

Sources and information: <http://www.hohetauern.at> (de), <http://www.bartgeier.ch> (de/fr/it/en), <http://www.aquilalp.net> (de/it/en)

Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)



© <http://www.altmuehltal.de/riedenburg/falken.htm>

## World Water Day: Calls for waterway conservation and a stop to deregulation

The motto for this year’s International Water Day on March 22 was “Water and Natural Catastrophes”. A number of organisations seized the day to put forward their demands for better water conservation.

The Swiss Federal Office for Water and Geology (FOWG) presented five brochures in German and French featuring exemplary flood projects in Switzerland and, more specifically, in its alpine region. The brochures are intended for providing technical information and an incentive for daring and innovative hydraulic engineering solutions. WWF Switzerland has indicated that natural rivers contribute significantly to both flood protection and the preservation of the wealth of species. There are still too few waterways being revitalised in Switzerland. The Austrian Umbrella Organisation for the Environment presented its Water Manifesto to the chairman of the Austrian Convention. It calls for a comprehensive protection of water as a life resource in the new federal constitution. In Germany, too, the “Our Water” network has called upon the federal government to do more against the deregulation of the global water supply.

Sources: <http://www.bwg.admin.ch> (de/fr/it/en), <http://www.wwf.ch/medien> (de), <http://www.umweltdachverband.at> (de), [http://www.vistaverde.de/news/politik/0403/19\\_wasser.php](http://www.vistaverde.de/news/politik/0403/19_wasser.php) (de)

## World's first institute for holiday, travel and altitude medicine

“Our aim with the founding of the Institute for Holiday, Travel and Altitude Medicine at the Private University for Health Sciences, Medical Informatics and Technology is to demonstrate and substantiate by medical and scientific means the favourable health effect of a high-altitude holiday. We also intend to establish a form of certification for tourist regions and tourist enterprises,” explained Tyrol’s Provincial Governor Herwig van Staa at the official presentation of the new Institute in Innsbruck/A. The new Institute also intends to highlight at the international level the health effects of prolonged stays in alpine regions.

Concrete programmes include an Interreg project on the subject of medicinal herbs in Tyrol and studies of allergy sufferers (the allergy burden caused by pollen, mould and dust mites diminishes significantly at altitudes of 1500 m and above). With its newly coined quality concept “Welltain” (a combination of “wellness” and “mountain”) the Institute aims to provide guests and holidaymakers with scientific proof of the health aspects of high-altitude holidays. Sources and information: Land Tirol 14.04.2004 <http://www.landeszeitung.at> (de), <http://www.umit.at> (de/en)

## Environmental management for the Everest region

The University of Torino/I and the Ev-K2-CNR Committee are currently conducting an international co-operation project called “Everest: A Remedy Against Damage Caused by Tourism” in the Everest region of Nepal. The aim is to develop an environmental management methodology to be able to lessen the negative impact of the 70,000 or so western tourists a year in the sensitive eco-systems of the Everest region.

With the help of the local population researchers are looking at ways of raising the awareness of environmental issues among the people employed in the tourism sector. They also plan to examine in what form, if any, the environment certification ISO 14001 can be applied in the Everest region. An adapted version is to be translated into Nepalese. The ISO certification has already been awarded to several mountain refuges in Italy.

Source and information: <http://web.econ.unito.it/cresta/convegna/file/everest.pdf> (it)

## Taking the train and bus to the ski slopes proves popular

More and more skiers are making use of the ski trains and buses operated by the Vorarlberg Transport Authority. The main ski resorts of Austria's westernmost federal province, i.e. the Montafon, the Kloster valley and the Arlberg region, can all be reached by public transport. The good results achieved this season have prompted the Transport Authority to expand its offers as far afield as southern Germany, among others.

For example the ski train to the Montafon, which on Sundays and public holidays operates directly from Lindau/D, had already transported more skiers by February than throughout the whole of the previous year's winter season. On reaching their destination without traffic jams skiers are offered other incentives to do without their cars: For instance they can "park" their skiing gear at the valley station and travel home in ordinary clothes. In many ski regions ski-train passengers are also eligible to a 10% discount on full-day and half-day ski passes.

In the coming season the Transport Authority intends to increase the number of ticket offices and intensify their co-operation with operators, tourist offices and travel agencies, especially in southern Germany. Indeed, the border with Austria is so close that many day tourists from Germany travel to Vorarlberg's resorts for their skiing.

Source and information: Vorarlberg Transport Authority 07.03.2004 <http://www.vmobil.at> (de)

Buying your ski pass from the train conductor



© Dietmar Stiplovsek

## St Moritz: the AlpenAkademie and a tourism, energy and agriculture alliance

The Swiss region of Engadine/St Moritz is focusing on the appeal of educational tourism, with the founding of the *AlpenAkademie* by the Academia Engiadina. A range of offers including language and computer courses as well as tourism, tour guide and management studies are already in place, and others are in preparation.

The GeoParc, which offers a broad spectrum of education topics, is of great significance: the total energy project *Clean Energy*, St Moritz as the highest altitude energy town, glaciers and permafrost, geology, Swiss national parks, weather and climate, etc. The *GeoParc* is scheduled to enter its pilot phase this summer with a range of initial offers.

The region has also created a new type of alliance between tourism, energy and agriculture. A regional organic cheese is to be manufactured under the brand name *Engadin* and sold essentially throughout the valley itself, to be enjoyed first and foremost by guests to the region. The whey, a residual product from cheese manufacture, is to be used to generate high-quality eco-current as part of a novel process in a waste-water purification plant.

Sources and information: 24.03.2004 <http://www.stmoritz.ch/media-news-002-030201-de.htm> (de)

## EU decisions on the issue of transport

During a Conciliation meeting held on 16 March the European Parliament and the European Commission reached an agreement on issues concerning the Second railway package. Under the agreement rail freight markets (incl. cabotage) are to be completely opened up as of 2007. Agreement was also reached on new regulations for railway safety and interoperability as well as the establishment of a European Railway Agency.

On March 11 the EP required that infrastructure projects developed as part of the Trans-European Transport Network be subject to a strategic environmental assessment. Projects which are "likely to have undesired social, economic or environmental consequences" are to be withdrawn from the priority list of projects to be developed. NGOs welcomed the decision and called on the Council of Transport Ministers to follow the EP in this matter.

Sources and information: [http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/questen.ksh?p\\_action.gettxt=qt&doc=IP/04/359|0|RAPID&lg=EN](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/questen.ksh?p_action.gettxt=qt&doc=IP/04/359|0|RAPID&lg=EN) (en), [http://www3.europarl.eu.int/omk/omnsapir.so/pv2?PRG=CALDOC&TPV=PROV&FILE=20040311&TXLST=1&POS=1&LASTCHAP=20&SDOCTA=5&Type\\_Doc=FIRST&LANGUE=EN](http://www3.europarl.eu.int/omk/omnsapir.so/pv2?PRG=CALDOC&TPV=PROV&FILE=20040311&TXLST=1&POS=1&LASTCHAP=20&SDOCTA=5&Type_Doc=FIRST&LANGUE=EN) (en)

## Italy: MOMO project for the development of new technologies in mountain regions

The EU MOMO project, which focuses on applied research benefiting small and medium-sized companies, was recently unveiled in the Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. Plastic materials for nanotechnology for example are to be developed at the Centre for Technological Innovations in Amaro. A total of ten partners from six countries are involved in the project. The project is to last three years and is endowed with a budget of €2 million.

In Friuli the competitiveness of companies in mountain regions is to be promoted with the aid of the project. This helps to secure the growth and further development of these regions and enhance the mountain region through the presence of qualified technical staff. Young people in particular are to obtain employment opportunities in the field of technical innovations and research.

Source: Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia 19.04.2004 <http://www.regione.fvg.it/asp/comunicati/ricerca/comunicato.asp?com=R20040419005> (it)

## Miscellaneous

### Presentation of an international umbrella brand for leisure & fitness holidays in the Alps

From the end of this year 80 businesses from Bavaria, Austria, Switzerland and southern Tyrol are to join forces and carry the new umbrella brand *Alpine Wellness International GmbH*. The merger of tourist organisations was presented at the ITB international tourism trade fair in Berlin. "Within five years we intend to rank among the brand leaders in the European health and leisure tourism," explains company director Bernhard Jochum. As of February 2005 quality-approved Alpine "wellness" regions are to be established for the first time in the Alps with common standards as a benchmark.

Sources and information: <http://www.tourismuspresse.at/detail.html?id=210038> (de)

### Early warning system for wolves

The New York Wildlife Conservation Society has developed an early warning system for wolf attacks to help prevent conflicts between man and beast, and as a result also protect the wolves. A geographic information system is used to correlate various data such as the location of grazing pastures, farm sizes and wolf habitats, which is then processed in maps and forecasts. According to researchers the system can be applied to any region and also to other predators.

Source and information: [http://www.vistaverde.de/news/Natur/0402/27\\_wolf.php](http://www.vistaverde.de/news/Natur/0402/27_wolf.php) (de)

### Electricity and heat essentially from renewable energies

By 2050 65% of electricity consumption and 50% of heating requirements in Germany could be provided by renewable energy sources. In 2050 this would cut at least 75% of greenhouse gas emissions (compared with 2000). These ambitious development objectives for renewable energies could be achieved in full compliance with all environmental and nature conservation issues, and would also benefit the economy. Sustainable energy supplies also depend on a sharp increase in the efficient use of fossil fuels. These are the findings of a study commissioned by the Federal Minister of the Environment.

Source and information: 18.03.2004 <http://www.bmu.de/de/800/js/presse/2004/pm069/> (de)

### Second Himalaya Film Festival: Time to submit your films!

Films can now be submitted for the Second Himalaya Film Festival, which is to be held at the Cultural Centre of the Free University Amsterdam/Netherlands on 6 and 7 November. The Film Festival aims to promote documentary and video films from the Himalayan region and make them known to a wider audience.

Sources and information: <http://www.himalayafilmfestival.nl> (en/nl)

## Agenda

Film festival and mountain book exhibition: **52. Trento International Mountain Film Festival** and **Montagnalibri, International Mountain Book Exhibition**; 01-09.05.2004, Trento/I; Information: <http://www.mountainfilmfestival.trento.it> (it/en)

**ECOMM – 8<sup>th</sup> European Conference for Mobility Management**; 05-07.05.2004, Lyon/F; organisers: Nouveau Monde Ontario; Information: <http://www.ontario-conference.com> (fr)

5<sup>th</sup> international conference and trade fair on renewable energies and ecological construction: **SolarExpo 2004**; 20-22.05.2004, Vicenza/I; Information: <http://www.solarexpo.com> (it/en)

Further education in hydrogeology and karst: **Hydrogeology and Management of Karst Groundwater Resources (MANKARST)**; 24-28.05.2004, Centre of Hydrogeology, University of Neuchâtel/CH; registration deadline 2 April, courses in English; Information: <http://www.unine.ch/foco/html/MANKARST-2004.html> (en)

International Conference on Renewable Energies: **renewables 2004**; 01.-04.06.2004, Bonn/D; featuring numerous related events such as International Parliamentary Forum on Renewable Energies, Municipal Leaders' Conference or Business Forum on Renewables; Information: <http://www.renewables2004.de/> (de/en)

### Oh!...

... Alpine beard champion Hans Gasser from the Austrian town of Leogang recently claimed the title of World Champion in the category "Full Beard, Free Style". Mr Gasser is set to defend his Olympic title as beard champion in his home town in May 2005. To ensure his spectacular whiskers are picture-perfect for competition, Mr Gasser is said to spend up to two hours preening his beard prior to the "big stage appearance".

Source: <http://www.salzburg.gv.at/lkorr-meldung?nachrid=32068> (de)