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European symposium on "light pollution"

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Seventy delegates from mountain communities in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan plus fifteen representatives of various international organisations attended the three-day conference on the subject of "Community development in the Central Asian mountain regions" in the Kyrgyzstani capital of Bishkek. The conference was organised by the Central Asian Mountain Partnership Program (CAMP), which is run by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation.

Antonio Zambon, Mayor of Budoia/I and Vice-President of the "Alliance in the Alps" community network, reported on the results achieved to date with community networking in the Alpine region. Andreas Götz, Executive Director of CIPRA, discussed the problems and potential presented by the Alps and pointed to the similarities and differences compared with Central Asia as a basis for the subsequent discussions.

As an opportunity for mutual exchange, the event was highly stimulating for attendees from both sides. A number of representatives of the mountain communities also addressed the major differences in terms of the general situation confronting the communities in the Central Asian mountains and the Alps. The "Alliance in the Alps" concept, however, still met with a very positive response, and at the end of the conference the community representatives took the unanimous decision to establish a network on the model of "Alliance in the Alps". A period of thorough preparation based on a clear timetable is to be followed by the official act of foundation, which will take place in Tajikistan in June 2003. The new network will also be open to communities from the other Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which were not represented in Bishkek.

The conference also passed a resolution on the importance of community development in mountain regions, which will be presented at the Global Mountain Summit to be held in Bishkek on 29 October 2002.

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Glacial ice avalanches – a difficult hazard to assess

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According to Italian glaciologist Luca Mercalli, the changing structure of the glaciers as a result of global warming in recent decades often triggers catastrophic events.

In response to the real dangers deriving from glaciers in Europe, too, a number of research institutes in Austria, France, Iceland, Italy, Norway and Switzerland have been working for three years on the GLACIORISK project, which is co-financed by the EU. The project involves researching past events in order to determine the most frequent types of hazards and to identify the conditions under which they develop. An inventory of all potentially hazardous glaciers in Europe is also being drawn up. The objective is to be able to predict destructive events, assess the magnitude of the potential damage and take preventive action. The intention is to publish guidelines on prevention and reduction of potential damage.

Sources: <http://www.rusland.ru> (de) 22.09.02, <http://www.montagna.org> (it) 24.09.02, <http://glaciorisk.grenoble.cemagref.fr> (en). Websites on the subject of glacial hazards: <http://glaciorisk.grenoble.cemagref.fr> (en), <http://www.nimbus.it/ghiacciai/glaciorisk.htm> (it), <http://www.lgge.obs.ujf-grenoble.fr/equipes/glaciers> (fr), <http://www.lemonde.fr/article/0,5987,3244--282196-,00.html> (fr), <http://www.alpinestudies.unibe.ch/tagungen/philap02/unterlagen/salzmänn.pdf> (de)

Effects of a glacial ice avalanche



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CIPRA conference on the role of NGOs

(19.09.02) This year's CIPRA conference, which was held in Schaan/FL on 12-14 September, was devoted to the social role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

An introduction to the conference was provided by Liechtenstein's Minister of the Environment. Then Hans Ruh, Professor of Ethics in Zurich/CH, spoke about the importance of NGOs in the light of the development of the civil society. Professor Ruh said that the market was incapable of regulating itself, as the latest economic crises had convincingly demonstrated, and that it was therefore necessary to introduce a system that offered more effective and broader support to the decision-makers and all parties involved. In this context he felt that NGOs had a decisive role to play and should be aware of the fact.

A number of instruments already give NGOs a degree of influence over decisions taken by governments and industry. Alfred Rest, Director of the Institute of International Law at the University of Cologne/D, discussed the powers of the Permanent Court of Arbitration for the Resolution of International Environmental Disputes in The Hague.

Alexandre Flückiger, Professor of Law at the University of Geneva/CH, presented an overview of the results of a study into the effects of the right of NGOs to take legal action in Switzerland. NGOs are three times more successful than the average in the case of complaints lodged with the Swiss Supreme Court. One effect of the access to the courts made available to NGOs in Switzerland – which they make sparing use of – has been an improvement in the quality of the projects submitted.

Representatives from France, Austria, Italy and also Tajikistan and Nepal then explained their roles and their perspectives as NGOs. Finally Dominik Siegrist, President of CIPRA-Switzerland, invited attendees to join him on the TransAlpedes Walk from Vienna to Nice, which has been held every year since 1992.

The proceedings will be published in October 2002. Conference programme: <http://www.cipra.org> (de/fr/it/sl)

2010 Winter Olympics – the Bernese say no

(26.09.02) The residents of the Canton of Berne/CH have rejected a proposal for credit financing for the 2010 Winter Olympics to be held in Berne. That makes it probable that Berne will withdraw the bid to host the games lodged with the International Olympic Committee.

In a plebiscite held on 22 September, over three quarters of the Bernese electorate voted against the proposed credit financing. The negative response was due to the weak state of the regional economy and ecological concerns. The cantonal government council must now take a formal decision on withdrawal of Berne's candidature. A plebiscite is mandatory in Switzerland for candidatures requiring financial support from public funds above a certain amount. Environmental organisations expressed satisfaction at the decision to reject the project.

The people of Canton Valais had clearly supported Sion's unsuccessful bid to host the 2006 Winter Olympics. Following the negative verdict in Berne, there are plans for a repeat of Sion's candidature for 2014.

Sources and information: Berne 2010 22.09.02 <http://www.berne2010.com> (de/fr/en), NZZ 22.09.02, W&O 23.09.02, SDA 23.09.02

European Symposium on “light pollution”

(12.9.02) On 7-8 September, Lucerne/CH was the venue for “Dark Sky - the 2nd European Symposium on the Protection of the Night Sky” under the patronage of the Swiss National Commission for UNESCO. The experts at the event addressed various aspects of light pollution such as its impacts on migratory birds and insects, differences in national legislation and the economic background.

“Light pollution” is the term given to excessive emissions of artificial light at night. In Germany, for example, there is so much light scatter today that it is rarely possible to see the Milky Way.

These relatively high levels of brightness have an impact on the flora and fauna.

According to Gerhard Eisenbeis, a zoologist at the University of Mainz/D, research to date suggests “that insect populations in built-up areas have declined”. In the long term that could mean a loss of diversity in insect life, which in turn would affect the next links in the food chain including birds as well as plants that are pollinated by insects. The potential impacts on human beings, says the astronomer Andreas Hänel, still require further research.

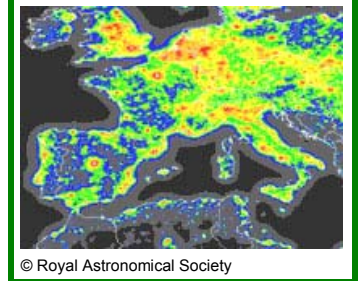
Last year a research team at the University of Padua/I produced a world atlas of light pollution (<http://www.lightpollution.it>, en). In addition to illuminated advertising and the use of powerful spotlights for events, discotheques, etc., ordinary street lighting is one of the main sources of light pollution at night.

Legislation to limit nocturnal light emissions had previously only been enacted at the regional level, e.g. in Lombardy/I. At the beginning of June, however, the Czech Republic introduced the first national law to control artificial light emissions into the night sky.

Source: http://www.vistaverde.de/news/Wissenschaft/0209/06_lichtverschmutzung.htm (de)

Information: <http://www.darksky.ch/ds2002> (en)

“Light pollution” over Europe



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Biodiversity in the mountain regions of the world

(19.09.02) “MOUNTAIN BIODIVERSITY: a global assessment” is the name of a book edited by Christian Körner and Eva Spehn of the University of Basle/CH on the basis of the papers presented at the 1st Conference on Biodiversity in Mountain Regions (7.-10.2000, Rigi-Kaltbad/CH).

Biodiversity is a key indicator for assessing the state of mountain ecosystems. More than half the population of the world is directly or indirectly dependent on mountain resources and the mountains as a reservoir for potable water. Problems of climate, topography and other factors combine to give mountain regions a prominent place among the world’s most endangered landscapes. The 28 chapters of the book address such topics as diversity of flora and fauna, climate change and land use.

Source and information: <http://www.unibas.ch/gmba/publications.html> (en)

“Protected Areas – Research Areas. The Alpine arc as a case study”

(12.09.02) The latest edition of the quarterly “Revue de Géographie Alpine” is devoted to research in protected areas in the Alpine space. The main focus is on the role of modern research in protected areas, its foundations and perspectives. The authors, representing various disciplines in four countries of the Alps, analyse in particular the importance of research work for the management of protected areas.

Isabelle Mauz, for example, describes the process of establishing the first major national parks in France. The author discusses the arbitrary nature of the concepts applied as a reflection of the diversity of the motives of the policymakers involved at the time. Friedrich Reimoser describes an objective monitoring system established in the Kalkalpen National Park to evaluate the impacts of hoofed animals on forest vegetation and permit tolerance limits to be defined for browsing damage caused by large game.

The articles are in French or German with English abstracts.

Information on the latest edition of the “Revue de Géographie Alpine” will be available soon at http://iga.ujf-grenoble.fr/teo/contenu/rga_numeros.htm (fr)

Miscellaneous

Funding for schools in the mountains (12.09.02) The regional authority of Piedmont/I has allocated EUR 800,000 in support of schools in mountain regions. Such schools are confronted with the twin problem of reduced staffing levels and sinking birth rates. The additional finance is intended to ensure that children in mountain regions can be guaranteed the same infrastructure as pupils in the lowlands. The goal is to stop the gradual process of depopulation now threatening many mountain areas and to maintain a level of education that will help counteract the structural disadvantages of the mountain regions.

Source: Press release from the Mountain Region Office of the Piedmont regional authority, 06.09.02

Rock faces as advertisement hoardings in the Himalayas (12.09.02) The advertisements for Coca Cola and Pepsi painted on rock faces along more than 50 km of roads in the Himalayas are a source of serious environmental damage. The paint used kills mosses and micro-organisms. The Indian Supreme Court has established a commission to assess the extent of the damage. In the meantime Coca Cola have indicated that they are uncertain whether they will foot the bill for cleaning up the damage.

Source: BBC News, 15.08.02

Protocols to the Alpine Convention in force in three countries on 18 December

(19.9.02) On 18 September Germany became the third state party to the Alpine Convention after Liechtenstein and Austria to deposit the instrument of ratification for the protocols. The nine protocols accordingly come into force on 18 December 2002.

Source: Alpine Convention Bureau of CIPRA-Austria, 18.09.02

Bilingual walkers' guide for the handicapped in South Tyrol

(19.9.02) A special guide with ten attractive walks has been published to ensure that people with restricted mobility (e.g. handicapped persons and the elderly) and also families with young children can still enjoy the mountain scenery of South Tyrol. The walks mainly follow wide woodland paths with only minor gradients and are carefully described. The guide has been produced by two Italian associations for the handicapped. A second volume with another ten walks is planned.

Information: http://www.espressonline.it/ESW_articolo/0,2393,21000,00.html (it)

Curative benefits of mountain air

(3.10.02) The Austrian Moderate Altitude Study (AMAS 2000) is the first such document to provide full scientific proof of the benefits to health of a mountain holiday. The results provide clear evidence of the positive effects of a period spent at moderate altitudes on blood count, oxygen transport, blood sugar and blood fat metabolism, blood pressure and heart rate, weight and also mental activity. In order to maximise these benefits to health, a mountain holiday should last at least three weeks.

Source and information: <http://www.kristberg.at/AMAS.htm> (de)

This year, Luzern Höhenklinik Montana is celebrating its jubilee as a rehabilitation clinic. The clinic is located at an altitude of 1500 m in Crans-Montana in the Swiss Canton of Valais. Treatments are available for patients with chronic pulmonary disorders, rehabilitation after heart, joint and back operations, and also for psychosomatic disorders.

Source: ots Press release, 30.9.02, information: <http://www.lhm.ch> (de)

(26.09.02) The Rome-based **Unione Nazionale Comuni Comunità Enti Montani** (UNCEM) is also celebrating its jubilee this year. The membership includes 361 mountain communities, approx. 4000 local authorities, a number of provincial authorities and various organisations that are active in Italy's mountain regions. The association works in support of the populations, the economy and the culture of mountain regions. It operates with a number of regional offices, whose task is to co-ordinate and support the activities of the local member organisations. UNCEM publishes a bi-monthly magazine and a fortnightly newsletter.

Source: <http://www.uncem.it> (it)

Agenda

United Nations campaign: Disaster Reduction for Sustainable Mountain Development

9 October, worldwide; goal: awareness-building and an exchange of experience on successful measures to protect mountain regions from natural disasters; information: <http://www.unisdr.org/unisdr/camp2002.htm> (en/span/rus, etc.)

International conference entitled "Uomini e Parchi oggi – Aree protette e comunità locali per uno sviluppo sostenibile della montagna" (**Man and Protected Areas Today – Protected Areas and Local Communities for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions**)

14-15 October, Gargano/I; organiser: Centro Studi "Valerio Giacomini" in collaboration with CIPRA-Italy; no charge for attendance; information: iolanda_negri@regione.lombardia.it, cmsegreteria@libero.it