

Underestimated soil



Fertile soil is a precious and scarce resource in the Alps. © Frank Schultze ZEITENSPIEGEL

We cannot breathe it, we cannot drink it, and yet it forms the very basis of our lives: soil feeds us, is home to us, protects us. Why has its importance hardly been recognised until today?

Links4Soils is one of the few projects advocating for the development of an Alpine-wide and cross-sector management in the area of soil conservation. Partners from throughout the Alpine region are creating a transnational network, sharing knowledge, exploiting synergies and thus aiming to put the protection of soil in the Alps on a wider footing. Both CIPRA Austria and the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention are participating in the Alpine Space Project as observers.

An Alpine-wide soil conservation network of this type would facilitate the implementation of the soil conservation protocol of the Alpine Convention which, according to Links4Soils, is so far deficient in its application and implementation. The main culprits

are the patchy data situation, the knowledge gap as regards sustainable conservation of ecosystem services, and the lack of workable management methods. This situation is also being addressed by the Eusalp Action Group 6 which, under the direction of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention, is focussing on "Spatial Development and Soil Conservation", including the difficulties of Alpine-wide soil conservation.

The challenge of EU legislation

As an international treaty in this area, the Soil Conservation Protocol is unique in Europe. At EU level there is no specific, binding legal framework to protect soils from the greatest dangers such as climate change, changes in land use, soil sealing, contamination or erosion. In 2006 the European Commission presented the first drafts for an EU-wide soil framework directive; then, in 2014, it withdrew them all. In response to this decision, over 300 representatives from civil society, research and agriculture came together to form the European citizens' initiative People4Soil, organising a year-long petition action that ended on 12 September 2017. It was however not possible to obtain the million signatures required to prompt the reopening of the discussion on the soil framework directive in the European Commission. Less than four weeks later, the Commission filed and shelved the initiative.

Damiano di Simine, representative of the civil initiative and head of Legambiente Lombardia, criticises the low priority given to soil conservation in the EU: "The problem is that the European Commission does not define soil as common property". Air and water move across borders, are therefore seen as a common issue for all Member States. Soil, however, is regarded as immobile and thus the responsibility of individual states. "This disregards the many services that soil provides us all with, whether by supplying us with food or by maintaining biodiversity", says Di Simine.

Sources and further information:

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Point of view: Municipalities as drivers for sustainable development



Jean Horgues-Debat, President of CIPRA France. © Caroline Begle

Sustainable development cannot be prescribed by law: it needs local people to put it into effect. Municipalities have a key role here, says Jean Horgues-Debat, the newly elected President of CIPRA France.

This year we are celebrating the anniversary of the founding of the "Alpine Town of the Year" association and the "Alliance in the Alps" network of municipalities. These two networks are forums for municipalities to join forces and implement and develop the sustainable development principles of the Alpine Convention. Protection of the Alps requires decisions and actions at the highest level of state: yet sustainable development cannot simply be prescribed by law. The struggle for sustainable development begins and ends with action on the ground. Municipalities stand at the heart of these challenges – but they are not always aware of their duty in this respect.

Every activity manifests itself in a particular location. The cross-sectoral aspects of policy are visible at local level, where economic, social and environmental issues intermix. The municipalities thus represent the first level for observation and

action. They cannot act alone, however, but need to construct dynamic steering systems with the population, the business sector and representatives of civil society.

There are some municipalities in the Alps, for instance in the regions of Ecrins or Oisans, that have experienced good results in this regard over the last 20 years. They have established centres to provide local services for citizens through partnerships with over 30 service providers in the major cities. This pooling of resources helps speed matters up and reduce social disparities.

These local initiatives, implemented by local people and supported by municipalities, are often innovative but also fragile. Networking can assist them to spread, support one another and build awareness, leading to a new orientation of public policy towards more sustainable development. This is a primary goal of the Alpine Town and Alpine Alliance networks: it is therefore vital to develop them further.

Society's demands mark the landscape



Podium discussion at the 2017 CIPRA Annual Conference: the challenges of spatial planning policy in the Alpine regions. © CIPRA

Conflicting needs and exaggerated expectations collide when it comes to spatial planning. Its role needs to be rethought, with a move away from overall planning and a shift towards guidance and awareness-raising. This was the tenor of the CIPRA Annual Conference held on 29 and 30 September 2017 in Innsbruck, Austria.

“Spatial planning must bid farewell to its claim to optimal overall design.” Thus the words of speaker Friedrich Schindegger at the CIPRA Annual Conference entitled “Alpine spheres – natural limits, infinite possibilities”, held in Innsbruck, Austria on 29 and 30 September 2017. It simply cannot live up to this claim: the individual interests of agriculture, businesses, investors and political entities today set the tone. Schindegger, an Austrian spatial planner, stated: “Landscape is the footprint of the values and the power distribution of the societies living there.” Spatial planning should reorient itself by taking responsibility for the common good and channelling general principles that are capable of appealing to the majority.

CIPRA Austria and CIPRA International, together with invited speakers, offered a very wide-ranging programme to the 200 or so participants from the worlds of science, business, politics and civil society. Gianluca Cepollaro, the director of “step”, the school for spatial and landscape planning in the Italian city of Trento, questioned the predominant notion of spatial planning: the image of man dominating nature is now obsolete. Today humans are seen as a part of nature; the Alpine regions are witnessing a growing awareness of habitats, especially among younger people. This notion must therefore also be integrated into planning, he said.

“We have to re-appropriate space”

The report entitled “State of Spatial Planning Policy in the Alpine Regions” provided plenty of room for discussion on the podium. Markus Reiterer, Secretary-General of the Alpine Convention, criticised the fragmentation of its contents: “Tourism and transport policies are also ultimately matters of spatial planning”. Instead of simply navel-gazing, spatial planning should face up to more open discussions, demanded Gerlind Weber, while Janez Fajfa, mayor of the Slovenian town of Bled, clearly illustrated the drawbacks that can result from misdirected planning at municipal level. Workshops in the afternoon provided the opportunity to exchange views on the topics of congestion in valleys, tourism centres, and rural areas caught between the pressures of development and emigration. Peter Haßlacher, President of CIPRA Austria, emphasised: “Spatial planning in the Alps is under pressure from the unchecked growth of certain tourist centres”.

Katharina Conradin, President of CIPRA International, said in conclusion: “We actually have a whole range of tools available for use in spatial planning.” Such tools are however often overridden ad hoc because of individual interests. Her call to the participants from all Alpine countries: “We have to re-appropriate space”.

Further information is available from CIPRA in its publication [SzeneAlpen no. 101](#) “Raum ist endlich [Space has its limits]”, in the [Web-Dossier](#) “Raumplanung in den Alpen [Spatial Planning in the Alps]” and [alpMonitor](#) with its interactive presentation “Alpwil – eine Gemeinde auf dem Weg zu mehr Lebensqualität [Alpwil – a municipality on the way to more quality of life]”. CIPRA's next annual conference will be held on 25 and 26 May 2018 in Bled, Slovakia.

Programme, image gallery and presentations:

www.cipra.org/de/jft2017 (de, fr, it, sl)

I-LivAlps: a conclusion for the future

September saw the fourth and final I-LivAlps workshop on social innovation held in the Valle Maira, Italy. The end of the project has produced a rich harvest.

alle Maira, Italy . The end of



Two participants at the workshops in Stroppo San Martino discuss social innovation. © Christian Baumgartner

Many of the new and returning participants in the workshops were unanimous: an I-LivAlps event is an outstanding example of co-operation between generations, as well as between lay people and experts from various fields, as well as CIPRA members and outsiders. With the “I-LivAlps” project CIPRA intends to strengthen the interest, knowledge, skills and engagement of young people in particular in the Alps. The results of the four events will provide CIPRA with a basis for other projects – for instance the awareness-raising project alpMonitor – and offer young people ideas for the shaping their lives and homelands. Other topics include tourism, housing & work, and spatial planning.

The fourth and final workshop took place in Stroppo San Martino, a remote community in the Valle Maira, and was devoted to the topic of “social innovation”. The task facing participants was different from the previous events’ objectives: this time they were to address a concrete case study on the ground. Participants were offered company and support by the mayor and other residents. Toni Büchel, a participant in every workshop

and joint facilitator at Stroppo San Martino, stated: “The subject of social innovation is still in its infancy, but has great potential. It needs motivated people, but also a fundamental appraisal of how we can organise ourselves differently as a society and as individuals.”

Part of the strategy and part of the success was that all four I-LivAlps events developed a life of their own, benefiting from the ever-changing configuration of the participants, the facilitators and the adapted methodical approach. Michaela Hogenboom, project manager for youth issues at CIPRA International, says: “I-LivAlps was a project in which the process itself was extremely important.” Participants of all generations, she said, were confronted in a wide variety of ways with one of the challenges facing the Alps. “They enthusiastically accepted these challenges and worked towards solutions, ideas and visions for the future.” The meetings produced project ideas both large and small, while motivation and inspiration surrounded the workshops like an invisible veil. Michaela Hogenboom hopes that this co-operative venture will manage to establish itself in the future.

The I-LivAlps project was financed by Erasmus+, CARIPLO and the Natum Foundation, while alpMonitor was financed by the Bristol Stiftung.

Further information:

www.cipra.org/en/cipra/international/projects/current/i-livalps, www.cipra.org/de/news/standpunkt-das-gesellschaftliche-miteinander-neu-denken (de, fr, it, sl), www.cipra.org/de/news/zwischen-abwanderung-und-erschliessungsdruck (de, fr, it, sl), www.cipra.org/de/news/ein-zukunftsbild-fuer-den-wintertourismus (de, fr, it, sl)

Reaching a conclusion: whatsalp arrives in Nice



Successful Alpine crossing: the whatsalp group arrives in Nice after a trek of 1,800 km. © whatsalp

After five countries, 568 hours of walking and 66,000 metres of altitude, on 29 September 2017 the “whatsalp” group arrived in Nice after a three-month trek through the Alps. The group’s conclusions were critical in nature.

Under the name “whatsalp”, since 3 June 2017 a group of Alpine experts has been walking from the Austrian capital Vienna, through Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy and finally to the French city of Nice. They documented the state of the Alps and exchanged views with local people. The core group was at various stages accompanied en route by some 200 fellow walkers, including young people from the CIPRA project “whatsalp youth”. The intention was to draw a comparison with the 1992 “TransALPedes” crossing of the Alps. CIPRA International and the Alpine Initiative accompanied whatsalp as project partners.

Whatsalp reached the French Mediterranean coast on 29 September. Its first conclusion was that the Alps came across as a diverse and exciting region. While some areas are witnessing rapid population growth, other areas are increasingly suffering from emigration. Compared to 1992, the younger generation in mountain areas today enjoys much less in terms of representation. Harry Spiess of the whatsalp core team is now calling for regionally adapted strategies to make the Alpine regions more attractive as places to live and work.

Shrinking glaciers, rock falls, extra infrastructure in the ski resorts: the effects of climate change in the Alps are all-pervasive. The need, according to the team, is for more consistent solutions. Differing strategies in the areas of tourism, forestry and agriculture were having direct effects on the Alpine landscape. In the words of Whatsalp member Dominik Siegrist, “Alpine tourism needs urgent reform to shift it more towards sustainability!”.

Detailed, country-specific conclusions about the “whatsalp” project, including as regards the growing traffic problem in the Alps, can be found under <https://whatsalp.org/de/medien>.

Sources and further information:

A pioneering region for a carbon-neutral economy and life



As part of the action programme “Greening the Economy in the Alpine Region”, six workshops will be held for those players who wish to contribute to the switch to a green economy. © travis-nobles_flickr

The economy of the Alps is to become greener . To make sure it takes on this colour , the comprehensive action programme “Greening the Economy in the Alpine Region” has been launched.

The sixth Report on the State of the Alps (RSA) from spring 2017 defines some key aspects for greening the economy: the economy should be low-carbon and resource-efficient, based on ecosystem services and natural capital, and support quality of life and well-being. Based on these results, the XIV Alpine Conference held in Grassau, Germany, in 2016 decided on the creation of an action programme for a green economy in the Alps. This is intended to support the transformation process and build foundations for concrete measures, projects and actions. The German Federal Environmental Agency commissioned a consortium consisting of CIPRA International, blue! advancing European projects, and Spatial Foresight with the development and implementation of the programme.

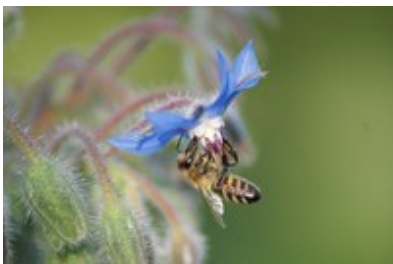
Local and regional players are to be involved in shaping the future Alpine green economy. Six workshops will be held on this theme in November and December, in Germany, Italy, Austria, France, and Switzerland. Interested parties can still register for

these. Topics will range from green financing and business models for the use of natural resources, to recycling, eco-innovations, climate change, and the role of municipalities and cities. In addition to the series of workshops, a survey will be conducted among relevant stakeholders, and there will also be an online platform for all those interested or directly involved in the development of the action programme.

Sources and further information:

www.cipra.org/de/gruenes-wirtschaften (de, fr, it, sl), www.alpconv.org/en/AlpineKnowledge/RSA/greenconomy/default.html

Salvation for the bees?



Bees and plant biodiversity need each other. Neonicotinoids and other insecticides disrupt this fragile ecosystem. © Monika Gstöhl

The European Commission is discussing the use of neonicotinoids. The damage caused by these insecticides also strongly affects bees.

In 2013 the European Commission decreed restrictions on the use of powerful neonicotinoids to control pests in agriculture. Now a total ban on their use outdoors is being discussed. Pharmaceutical companies, such as Bayer CropScience and Syngenta, have appealed to the European Court of Justice. For the corporations involved this may mean losses running into billions. For the EU, however, it is a matter of the future of the environment and the conservation of biodiversity.

Neonicotinoids are among the world’s most widely used insecticides. They protect plants by poisoning biting and sucking insects. Their impact on honey and wild bees is however particularly disturbing, ranging from a slight weakening to death of these pollinating insects. This is shown in a study by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), for example.

If bees – or even whole species of bees – die out, this would have serious effects on biodiversity. Jean-Daniel Charrière, director of the Swiss Centre for Bee Research, explains: “The diversity of our plant life depends on the diversity of the pollinators”. Honey bees, wild bees and other pollinators all complement one another. “A reduction in the biodiversity of pollinators can also reduce the long-term biodiversity of plants”, says Charrière.

Unlike in the lowlands, honey and wild bees in mountainous areas are not so noticeably affected by the use of neonicotinoids, as these regions are less accessible and less intensively farmed. Clear studies of the situation in the Alps are lacking, but it is believed that other developments are threatening bees there. One major possible problem is the dwindling number of food sources and nesting possibilities owing to the controlling and channelling of waters.

Sources and further information:

www.euractiv.de/section/landwirtschaft-und-ernahrung/news/leak-eu-will-pestizide-zum-schutz-von-bienen-verbieten (de) , www.wecf.eu/german/pressemeldungen/2017/Neonicotinoide-Verbot.php (de) , www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/bee-health

A blessing and a curse



The overwhelming beauty of the landscape of Bled, Bohinj and the Triglav National Park clearly demonstrates why the region is a tourist magnet. © Slovenska turistična organizacija

Some places are deserted, others are overrun by tourists. The two Slovenian municipalities of Bled and Bohinj in the Triglav National Park were faced with the latter situation, as they struggled with masses of cars this summer.

Visitors on the way to the Triglav National Park and Bohinj cannot avoid Bled. The village is located on a scenic lake with an island in the middle, all ideal for swimming, picnicking and relaxing. In the last three years these locations have attracted almost 50% more tourists than before. The increase is mainly attributable to day-trippers: most of these come in their own cars and often ignore the official parking areas. The municipalities are now trying to find a solution for the benefit of residents, visitors and, last but not least, the natural environment.

For some time now the regional tourist authorities have made a name for themselves with their sustainable, prudent style of tourism management. Bohinj has been a strong advocate for public transport, while both communities are also members of the “Alpine Pearls” network. A guest card, for example, offers visitors free public transport. In order to regulate the large numbers of visitors, the town of Bled has asked local visitors to

observe the official car parking areas, to travel by public transport and preferably to visit the region in autumn rather than in summer to help alleviate the situation. Responses vary from understanding to head-shaking. The municipalities now wish to see the Slovenian authorities also commit to sustainable development in the region, for example with a better feeder system for public transport so that more people will decide to come by train. Spela Berlot, executive director of CIPRA Slovenia, welcomes the commitment on the part of the municipalities: “As gates to the Triglav National Park, Bohinj and Bled are also role models for other tourist regions.” It is thus vital to find sustainable solutions for these challenges.

Sources and further information:

www.slovenskenovice.si/novice/slovenija/foto-bohinj-omejuje-vstop-turistom (sl), www.delo.si/nedelo/jezerska-skleda-prepolna-nereda.html (sl), www.rtvlo.si/tureavanture/podobe-slovenije/pre-polni-bled-pridite-raje-jeseni-bohinj-tudi-doma-ne-parkirate-na-zelenici/429686 (sl), www.rtvlo.si/tureavanture/novice/slovenski-gostje-na-bledu-niso-nezazeleni/429767 (sl), www.gorenjski Glas.si/article/20170815/C/170819848/1009/domaci-gosti-vendarle-dobrodosli (sl)

Oh...



© jungfrau.ch

Funfair up on the mountain

Visitors to Grindelwald, Switzerland, can now watch giant eagles soaring in the wild – or even glide on one. Jungfraubahnen, the local ski lift operator, has now invested 1.5 million Swiss francs in a huge zip line in the form of an eagle running between the top and middle stations of the First gondola. Four people can hang below the eagle, zooming down to the valley at speeds of up to 83 km/h. The cost for adults is CHF 29; children pay CHF 22. Other ideas to stage and revive Alpine fauna are surely forthcoming: racing on seatless Trotti-bikes modelled on wolves and sheep, for example, or quad-bears growling through the woods?

Sources:

www.jungfrau.ch/de-ch/grindelwaldfirst/first-glider (de), www.bernerzeitung.ch/region/oberland/wie-ein-adler-talwaerts-gleiten/story/13158385 (de)

Agenda

innsbruck nature film festival, 10.-13.10.2017, Innsbruck/A. [More...](#)

6th International Symposium for Research in Protected Areas, 02.-03.11.2017, Salzburg/A. [More...](#)

COP23 - UN Climate Change Conference 2017, 06.-17.11.2017, Bonn/D. [More...](#)

Reading Mountain Festival, 11.12.2017, different places in the Alps, Organisation: Alpine Convention. [More...](#)