



The expansion and technical development of ski areas is only a short-term solution in the light of climate change. © DAV, Manfred Scheuermann

Ski tourism: an insatiable hunger

Gigantic artificial lakes, myriads of snow cannons, secret forest clearances. Ski areas are continuing to expand in all Alpine countries, often using questionable methods and concepts. Below are three examples.

What is the future for winter tourism in the Alps? Scientific studies reckon that skiing is losing the race against global warming. Expansion is nevertheless forging ahead everywhere, not even stopping for protected areas, although the Alpine Convention requires signatory Alpine countries to maintain such areas. The following examples from Italy, Austria and Germany show how the last unspoilt natural areas left in the Alps are being treated – and just how important it is for civil society to get involved.

The Sexten Dolomites: excavators pre-empt the courts

The Italian administrative court has now decided that construction of the Helm-Rotwand ski link in the Dolomites will be permitted, subject to 50 conditions. Prior to the final decision of the court, however, the developers created facts on the ground: in August 2013, during one weekend in the holiday season, ten hectares were cleared of forest in order to pre-empt the court-ordered building freeze, decreed for the following Monday. Environmental organisations and citizens' movements had criticised the project on the grounds that a natural area and a habitat for rare plants and animals was being destroyed to make way for two new ski pistes and lifts. A single cable car system, without slopes, could also have connected the two ski areas.

Mölltal Glacier: the Alpine Convention shows the way

Can a nature reserve be made smaller for a ski slope? This is the argument in Carinthia, Austria. Investors are planning a 900-bed hotel on the Mölltal Glacier. They aim to invest 90 million euros, but also want to create a downhill run through the two nature reserves of Kleinfragant and Wurten-West. The Nature Conservation Council, referring to the Alpine Convention, has now rejected the planned ski slope. A report by CIPRA Austria claims that the project would be contrary to international law, as protected areas must be preserved as such. Laws cannot simply be changed. The decision of the Nature Conservation Council is in fact binding. Some political parties however, including the People's Party, as well as the mayors in the Mölltal Valley, want the project to go ahead at all costs.

Sudelfeld: the largest and most controversial expansion in Germany

The expansion of the Sudelfeld ski area, supposedly in the public interest, is going ahead. In mid-April 2014 the authorities approved the construction of an artificial lake together with snow-making facilities in the protected landscape area of Sudelfeld. The lake alone is gigantic, covering an area of

1.5 hectares with a dam height of up to 38 metres, all designed to provide water to over 250 snow cannons. The Bavarian State Government wants to contribute up to 45 million euros. Mountain and environment organisations have criticised the decision as sending the wrong signal for nature conservation and tourism: the investment is short-sighted on account of climate change, while many questions regarding the effects on the water inventory remain unclear. Nor should public money be used to destroy a protected landscape area. The Bund Naturschutz conservation group and the German Alpine Association are therefore petitioning the courts for a construction freeze on the project.

Source and further information: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/streit-um-skigebiet-gigantische-baumassnahme-soll-zukunft-des-sudelfeld-retten-1.1943883> (de), http://www.alpenverein.de/presse/beschneigung-sudelfeld-klage_aid_14106.html (de), http://www.landesforstdirektion.ktn.gv.at/27987p_DE-ktn.gv.at.?newsid=22568&backtrack=27987 (de), <http://kaernten.orf.at/news/stories/2643194/> (de), <http://www.forum-bruneck.com/?tag=rotwand> (de)

Point of view



Katharina Conradin is Executive Director of Mountain Wilderness Switzerland © Heinz Hess

Preserving the strongholds of the Alps

Dozens of development projects are simmering in the drawers of investors from Slovenia to France. It is thus even more important to sustain existing protected areas, says Katharina Conradin, member of the executive board of CIPRA International and executive director of Mountain Wilderness Switzerland.

In Austria, the two ski areas of Axamer Lizum and Schlick are to be linked directly via the official quiet area of Kalkkögel. In Bavaria, excavators are already on course, with official blessing, to build a reservoir of as-yet unknown dimensions to provide artificial snow for the low-lying Sudelfeld ski area – in the middle of a protected landscape area. In Switzerland permission has just been granted for the Andermatt-Sedrun ski area connection with seven new and eight replacement lifts. The reason is always the same: to maximise profits. The loss in terms of nature is not included in the calculations. Protection and profit can go hand-in-hand. There are destinations throughout the Alpine region that deliberately avoid intensive winter tourism and still manage perfectly well financially. Innovations in timber construction increase the value of the abundant quantities of wood available, proving that aesthetics and the careful use of resources can complement each other. Trading in regional high-quality produce from mountain areas relieves transport axes and helps preserve local cultures and landscapes.

Such good examples do not mean that protection is now obsolete as a stand-alone objective. Sustainable use must have top priority. This requires guidance, including in the form of protected areas. We can only ensure the long-term use of natural resources if we also preserve them. Protected areas are the strongholds for the wealth that exists in the Alps. It would be fatal to sacrifice them to the short-term pursuit of profit.

**Katharina Conradin,
Executive Director of Mountain Wilderness Switzerland**



Looking for answers to resource shortages

Resources are finite, including those in the Alps. What solutions are available for living a good life that do not simply depend on ever more consumption? Some answers will be provided at the CIPRA Annual Conference to be held in November 2014 in Annecy, France.

The CIPRA Annual Conference on 13-15 November 2014 in Annecy, France, will address the question of what is required for good living in the Alps. © Heinz Hess

New technologies proclaim solutions for environmental and climate problems without questioning the dogma of growth. The reality, however, is that more and more natural resources are being consumed and that CO₂ emissions continue to increase. This year's CIPRA Annual Conference, to be held from 13 to 15 November 2014 in Annecy, France, will provide a common platform for developing ideas for new lifestyles. Based on the firm view that a good quality of life in the Alps cannot be based on ever-increasing consumption and resource depletion, the conference will question current spatial planning policies and economic systems and provide an impulse for new and creative approaches. As an Alpine town on a lake, that also faces numerous different demands in terms of its use, the French city of Annecy is a clear example of the relevance of the themes addressed.

Futurologists such as Hugues de Jouvenel will relate how new lifestyles, resource sharing and new forms for the economy can contribute to a good life for all in the Alps. Michil Costa, a hotelier from the Italian province of South Tyrol, will show how economics serving the common good, i.e. a form of economics that puts the needs of humans and nature first, can be implemented in a large hotel business. Among others Ueli Strauss, Director of the Spatial Planning Office of the Canton of St. Gallen in Switzerland, will also be demonstrating what answers spatial planning can offer.

The Friday session will see open discussions where visions for "sufficient Alps" will be debated and developed. There will also be questions as to how these visions can find a place in Alpine policy and how the new EU Strategy for the Alps can be made more sustainable and sufficient.

Source: <http://cipra.org/en/events/cipra-annual-conference-2014>



Signal fires against transit traffic

Transit traffic over the main Alpine crossings is steadily increasing. Projects such as a second tube for the Gotthard road tunnel are increasing the attractiveness of road transport for goods. This year's CIPRA action, "Fire across the Alps", takes aim at this trend.

For many years, fires have been lit at the beginning of August as a signal to protect the Alps. © Marfis75, flickr

Once again this year, the second weekend in August will see the annual lighting of "high fires" on the

Alpine peaks. In 2014 the signal fires, organised each year by CIPRA Switzerland, are intended to warn against the growing problem of transit traffic, with more and more valleys witnessing the negative effects of road traffic. The Swiss Federal Council recently decided to build a second tube for the Gotthard Tunnel, despite the Federal Constitution clearly stating that transit routes in Alpine regions may not be expanded. On the Brenner Pass, the busiest Alpine crossing, transit traffic is also once more increasing after a decline caused by the economic crisis. This year's fires will draw attention to the fact that protection of the Alps is all too often being undermined in many countries. You can register for the "Fire across the Alps" action at: <http://www.feuerindenalpen.com/>

Source: http://www.feuerindenalpen.com/mainframe.php?seiten_id=24 (de), http://www.alpeninitiative.ch/alpine-initiative/topics/second_bore.html, <http://tirol.orf.at/news/stories/2642993/> (de)

News from the Alps



Bad atmosphere in the Alps

Never before have atmospheric CO2 levels been as high as those recorded in April 2014. Many Alpine valleys are suffering from poor air quality. This puts the health of many people in the Rhône-Alpes Region at risk - lower motorway speeds can be part of the solution.

Dismal record: CO2 levels in April 2014 were higher than ever before.
© Pfala, flickr

April 2014 saw the highest CO2 levels in the atmosphere since records began. There are also high levels of other pollutants. In its report in 2013 on air quality for the Rhône-Alpes Region, the French "Air Rhône-Alpes" Observatory concludes that the limit values for particulate matter and nitrogen oxides (among others) are not being met. One quarter of the residents of the region are exposed to harmful levels of ozone, with 150,000 people affected by excessive levels of particulate matter, especially in the Arve Valley in the Chambéry agglomeration and in Albertville. One of the measures intended to improve air quality is that the agglomeration of Grenoble will get an air-quality protection plan this summer.

Above-average particulate matter levels were recorded along the major transport axes in particular. Limiting motorway speeds to 100 km/h substantially contributes to improving air quality. A study of autobahns in Tyrol backs this conclusion: driving at 100 km/h reduces pollutants by up to 15% compared to a speed of 130 km/h. To ensure that the EU limits are met, however, will require further measures in addition to speed limits, such as a general temporary ban on heavy goods vehicles.

Source and further information:

http://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/canali/energiaeambiente/rifiuti/2014/04/30/aprile-2014-il-mese-piu-inquinato-della-storia_1cfde261-45c6-4b75-a309-6d95ce38cb82.html (it), <http://www.tt.com/home/8314712-91/tempo-100-bringt-mehr-als-sektorales.csp> (de), https://tirol.gruene.at/artikel/schwarz_auf_weiss-tempo_100_bringts (de), <http://www.actu-environnement.com/ae/news/qualite-air-rhone-alpes-pollution-pm10-reste-preoccupante-21476.php4#xtor=ES-6> (fr), <http://www.datapressepremium.com/rmdiff/2007506/DP-AIR-RHONE-ALPES-OK.pdf> (fr), <http://www.srf.ch/meteo/meteo-news/neuer-hoehchstwert-der-co2-konzentration> (de)

Agenda

C3-Alps Final Conference Announcement, 14.10.2014, Vienna/AT, Organisers: C3-Alps, Alpine Space, Österreichischer Städtebund. [More...](#)

Public Workshop “The Guidelines for local adaptation in mountain regions: which prospects for the Alps and beyond?”, Brescia/IT, 23.06.2014, Brescia/IT, Organisation: Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention. [More...](#)

5TH WATER CONFERENCE: “Water in the Alps - and beyond: Adapting alpine and mountain river basins to climate change”, 25.-26.09.2014, Trento/IT, Organisation: Alpine Convention, UNECE Water Convention. [More...](#)

Workshop on sustainable building: from strategy to realization, 17.10.2014, Idrija/SI, Organisation: "Alpine Town of the Year" association. [More...](#)

Gathering for Mont Blanc, 15.06.2014, Chamonix/FR, Organisation: ProMontBlanc, Mountain Wilderness FR, CH, IT. [More...](#)

Strange but true!

... a white complexion, slim, almost dainty – truly a feast for the eyes. And, most important of all, very well developed. The first asparagus was harvested in Bavaria in March 2014, in Schrobenhausen on the outskirts of Munich. This vegetable, prized in Germany, is not usually ready for harvesting there before mid- to late April. Production of the early Schrobenhausen asparagus was in part due to underfloor heating, with warm water piped under the beds and a multi-layer plastic film covering the frames. Protected in this fashion, the young plants grow while all around is still winter – incidentally contributing to global warming as, standing at the edge of the cultivation area, is a stove producing heat from wood chips. Not for homes, but for asparagus. For this asparagus (just as for all the other fine things in life) we can only say: the origin is not the be all and end all.

Source:

<http://www.zeit.de/2014/16/spargelanbau-freiland-fussbodenheizung/komplettansicht> (de)