

alpMedia Newsletter - summary 08/2015 - 01/2015

Traditional nature conservation in crisis



Old prejudices? 27 of 29 municipalities rejected the Charter of the French Vanoise national park, among them the municipality of Termignon © Parc National de la Vanoise – Nathalie Tissot

The interim review of the European Union's biodiversity strategy for 2020 makes sobering reading: more than three quarters of all important natural habitats are in poor condition, with many species threatened with extinction. "The loss of biological diversity is equivalent to the loss of the basis of our own existence", states Karmenu Vella, the EU's commissioner for the environment. "Neither we nor our economies can afford it." The demand is for member states in particular to take further measures at national level, not just in protected areas, but also and especially in the farming and forestry sectors.

A Eurobarometer survey shows that biodiversity is clearly important to humans, and they wish to protect it. Existing protected areas in the Alps are nevertheless coming under pressure. In Italy the Stelvio / Stilfser Joch national park is to be broken up. In Slovenia there is uproar over the fate of the Triglav national park: its eight surrounding municipalities were to receive financial support under a revised law, but the promised resources cannot be disbursed because of the economic crisis, with some municipalities now causing difficulties.

Irrational prejudices

In France the area surrounding the Vanoise national park will shrink by a seventh of its current size because 27 of 29 communities have rejected the new Charter there. It should be noted that several local mayors were for the proposal, but voters, in part represented by local councillors, were against it. Rémi Zanatta, Mayor of Termignon, is disappointed: "The Vanoise national park is a strategic cornerstone of tourism. The Charter would have been a logical consequence." The project was prompted by a national law of 2006, intended to strengthen co-operation between the national park and the surrounding municipalities.

Why do protected areas face such problems? In the Vanoise national park it is surely the special circumstance that 26 of the 29 communities here host winter sports facilities, including three of the world's top ten areas in terms of size. It was clearly not possible to impart the idea of the benefits. "The Charter was regarded as a brake on development", is the reaction of park director Emmanuel Michau. "Yet it is primarily a partnership tool for regional development." In other French parks 75-80% of the municipalities immediately voted yes.

CIPRA Italy takes a new path

The question is thus: How can co-operation and understanding between conservation activists and users be improved? CIPRA in Italy is setting an example: together with its member organisations, some of which hold enormously differing positions, CIPRA Italy has a prepared strategy document that proposes

implementation measures. The approach is that, by bringing together those concerned and those involved at local level, protected areas can provide answers not only to questions concerning biodiversity, but also to expectations regarding the quality of life.

Source and further information: http://www.vanoise-parcnational.fr/fr/documentation-en-ligne/doc_download/2687-la-charte-du-parc-national-de-la-vanoise--le-present-et-lavenir.html (fr), http://www.adnkronos.com/sostenibilita/risorse/2015/10/05/una-petizione-per-salvare-stelvio-associazioni-mattarella-fermi-smembramento_KKiRZuvsA7xgCzBWf8xB1K.html (it), <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/2020.htm>, <http://www.cipra.org/it/cipra/italia> (it)

Point of view: He who sows infrastructure, reaps more traffic



Barbara Wülser is Communications Manager at CIPRA International. © Martin Walser

Traffic will flow where it can most quickly and easily reach its destination. That is the logic of the free-market economy as propounded on all sides, and which also forms part of the overland traffic agreement between the European Union and Switzerland. The agreement forbids any artificial limitation on traffic capacity. We thus see the first and sorest point of the matter on which Swiss voters go to the polls on 28 February 2016: the project undermines the policy aimed at a modal shift.

Switzerland wants to build a second road tunnel on the Gotthard Pass at a cost of four billion francs, but only to permit the single-lane use of both tunnels following refurbishment of the existing one. Following a Swiss ballot, it was enshrined in the constitution that goods traffic over the Alps had to be shifted onto the railways within ten years. That was in 1994. The implementation of the statutory target of an annual maximum of 650,000 trucks crossing the Alps has been repeatedly postponed. Today the number stands at one million trucks. The federal government has in the meantime abandoned the goal.

Without any consistent strategy, such rail projects will remain pipe dreams. At present the rail system in Switzerland is only working at 60% capacity. As of December 2016, goods and passenger trains will start rolling through the newly opened longest tunnel in the world, also on the Gotthard Pass, which cost twelve billion francs. Some 40% of the rail capacity will remain available. How can this long-term project possibly pay off if at the same time it is competing with an expansion of road capacity?

As also demanded by CIPRA's position paper, traffic has to be avoided and shifted onto rail, but not at the cost of other regions. On the Brenner Pass, by far the most heavily used Alpine transit route, the number of heavy goods vehicles increased by 25% between 1999 and 2013, with the associated hazards of noise and air pollution for local people. Nearly two millions trucks grind over the pass each year. With the building of a second tube, the Gotthard route would become the shortest four-lane road link between northern and southern Europe, drawing traffic streams from elsewhere. The costs of a second road tunnel on the Gotthard are some three billion francs higher than for a modest refurbishment. Annual operating and maintenance costs will add another 25 to 40 million. Yet money is lacking elsewhere, particularly in the big cities.

Those living on the Brenner Pass and at other Alpine transit points may well rejoice at the prospect of the relief provided by a second Gotthard tube. However, even with a "yes" vote, they would still have to

wait until at least 2027 (and possibly until 2033) before the new tunnel is completed and the old one refurbished. Who will then remember what was promised back in 2016?

Source and further information: www.cipra.org/en/positions/transport-sufficiency-towards-a-new-sustainable-mobility-culture, <http://ai.zweite-roehre-nein.ch/> (de), <http://ai.2tunnel-non.ch> (fr), <http://ai.noalraddoppio.ch> (it), www.bav.admin.ch/landverkehrsabkommen/index.html (de/fr/it), www.bav.admin.ch/verlagerung/01529/index.html (de/fr/it)

A toolbox for climate change



The risks and opportunities of climate change will be explored in a participatory process in the Swiss region of Surselva. © Seecon SA

What risks will climate change bring for the Alpine regions? Does it also mean opportunities? What are the most promising possibilities for adaptation? Together with the Swiss region of Surselva and partners such as the Swiss consulting and project development firm seecon, CIPRA has now developed a toolbox for managing the consequences of climate change. It translates scientific findings regarding regional climate scenarios into concrete risks and opportunities for regional living areas, economic zones and natural spaces, while giving an overview of possible adaptation measures.

The Climate Toolbox is currently being tested in Surselva. Local people are identifying the risks and opportunities for the region in a participatory process and are planning bespoke adaptation measures.

The project is being supported by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment under the “Adaptation to Climate Change” pilot programme.

The climate tool box shows that municipalities and regions in the Alps are setting a good example. They are implementing their own measures to meet the demand for a stringent climate policy, as was also heard in the appeal by Alpine communities and organisations for “Climate protection now!” in Paris in December 2015.

As an example, “100max”, an “Alpine game for climate protection”, sees some 70 households in the Alps testing climate-friendly lifestyles. The benchmark is the idea that “a good day has 100 points”. CIPRA initiated and is accompanying the “100max” project, which is financed by the German Federal Ministry of the Environment.

Source and further information: www.cipra.org/de/cipra/international/projekte/laufend/klima-toolbox (de), www.cipra.org/sl/cipra/international/projekti/tekoci-projekti/cca-toolbox (sl), www.cipra.org/it/cipra/internazionale/progetti/in-corso/cca-toolbox (it), www.cipra.org/de/100max (de), www.cipra.org/fr/100max/100max (fr), www.cipra.org/it/100max/100max (it), www.cipra.org/sl/100max/100max (sl)

Alpine municipalities strengthen youth participation

Drawing on the project “Youth Shaping Alpine Municipalities” (YSAM), local councillor Josef Biedermann concludes: “In Planken we have seen that politicians have to exchange and engage with young people. This is the only way for participation to succeed”. Over the



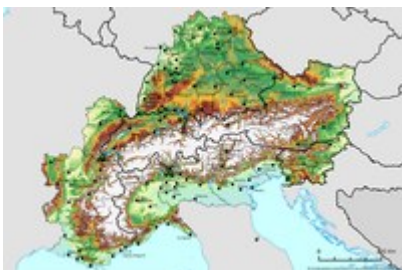
Exchanging experiences on equal terms: youth and politicians in dialogue during the closing stages of YSAM. © Josef Biedermann

course of one and a half years, the YSAM project brought together young people, politicians and youth workers from seven Alpine municipalities in Italy, Slovenia, Germany and Liechtenstein, with the focus on international exchanges of experience. After the project was over, youth participation continued with each municipality implementing a project together with the young people. For example, in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, bags made of fabric and designed by young people will help reduce the flood of plastic. The project is backed by the “Alpine Town of the Year” association and sponsored by the European Union’s “Youth in Action” programme and the Heidehof foundation. CIPRA ran the YSAM scheme and provided technical support.

Municipalities in Switzerland that make particular efforts to address the concerns of young people can now apply for the new label of “youth-friendly mountain villages” from the Swiss Working Group for Mountain Areas (SAB). The SAB wants to reverse the trend of young people drifting away from these communities. The first awards have already been made: the label will in future be granted to municipalities selected by their young people according to criteria established by the SAB.

Source and further information: <http://www.alpenstaedte.org/de/projekte/jugend/ysam> (de), <http://www.jugend-im-berggebiet.ch/> (de)

Alpine regional strategy on the starting blocks



Functional space: Eusalp brings the Alpine regions closer together. © European Commission

Ministerial and administrative committees and three main themes, each occupying several working groups, now generally reflects the structure of the European Strategy for the Alps (Eusalp). The three main pillars are improving competitive ability; sustainable connectivity for all, with the creation of integrative ecological conditions; and renewable, reliable energy solutions. If, as expected, the Alpine regional strategy is ratified by the European Council in December 2015, it will be implemented during the following year. It is to be introduced at a conference on 25-26 January 2016 in Brdo, Slovenia.

Eusalp is intended to improve co-operation between the Alpine states and regions in order to permit them to react to global and regional challenges. The drafting process saw the involvement of all seven Alpine states, 48 Alpine regions, the European Union’s Alpine space programme, the Alpine Convention and other stakeholders. CIPRA also took part in the specific working groups and tried to ensure that the sustainability and participation requirements were met (see position paper at www.cipra.org/de/positionen/118).

CIPRA was only partly satisfied with the results. “Unfortunately the opportunity to implement the widely discussed sustainable future for the Alps was not fully taken up”, said Claire Simon, executive director of CIPRA International. “Instead of being at the strategy’s core, sustainability was treated as just one element among many.” The creation of new committees – instead of looking for increased synergies, e.g. in the Alpine Convention’s existing working groups – was a missed opportunity, she believes.

To be a genuine instrument, the Alpine regional strategy must be implemented by people at local level. But clarity is needed as regards the levels for assigning the various competences and tasks and how to

ensure that the decision-making process is participatory in nature. Only then can the Alpine networks and organisations – including CIPRA – position themselves and strengthen sustainable goals and measures in the context of Eusalp.

Source and further information: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/alpine/, <http://www.cipra.org/de/positionen/118>

Swiss reheat Olympic candidacy



A burdensome legacy: maintaining the bobsleigh run built for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin costs 2.2 million euros a year. © Francesco Pastorelli

Obstinacy – or another opportunity? What has changed in the last two years since voters in Graubünden rejected St. Moritz's candidacy for the 2022 Winter Olympics? That exercise cost the public purse 5.1 million Swiss francs. But the authorities in Graubünden now believe that conditions have changed, and are supporting the drafting of an application for the 2026 games by the Graubünden trade associations.

Different year, same old arguments: the Winter Olympics will supposedly provide a much-needed boost to tourism. The rejection of a referendum is also being justified on the basis of the statement of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which one year ago adopted a sustainability charter. Now a number of locations are permitted to join together for the games in order to make better use of existing infrastructures, while more use can be made of temporary facilities. There will in addition be a follow-up of the effects of the games. Whether and how these good resolutions will be implemented is to be seen in 2024 and subsequently, once the charter comes into force.

In Wallis too, noises can be heard in favour of the Olympics – for the fourth time. The last time, in 2006, the IOC awarded the games to Turin in Italy. The cost: 3.5 billion euros, rather than the estimated €500 million. The sports facilities in the mountain villages are hardly used, or have simply been left to rot. The operating costs too are a heavy burden for mountain communities, with the bobsleigh run alone devouring 2.2 million euros each year.

Ultimately it is up to the Swiss Olympic Federation to decide whether Switzerland will put forward a candidate, and if so, who it will be. The Swiss Federal Council must also agree the candidacy before the electorate in the cantons concerned can once again vote on the matter. The IOC will decide in 2019 on the venue for the 2026 winter games.

Source and further information: <http://olympia-nein.ch/go/aktuelles/meldungen/mmsp.php> (de), <http://www.cipra.org/de/news/4210> (de), <http://www.srf.ch/news/regional/bern-freiburg-wallis/olympia-2026-im-wallis-kantonsregierung-schaut-genau-hin> (de)

Hot topic: mountain biking

Discussions about bicycle tourism in the Alps are marked by controversy. Some see the potential for growth and opportunities for tourism, while others fear that bicycles mean yet more excessive use of the Alps. Interest groups in the various countries are reacting to the



Free ride for mountain bikes?

This increasingly popular sport is provoking discussion across the Alps. © Felix Kaeser-Funk

situation: the German Alpine Club (DAV) has now published a “mountain bike” position paper that provides recommendations for practising the sport in a responsible manner, while offering partnership-based co-operation for all those involved.

While there are practically no limits on mountain-biking in South Tyrol, in April 2015 the province of Trentino extended its restrictions on the activity, with not only topographical criteria now being taken into account, but also its effects on the environment and on walkers. This increasingly popular sport is becoming a hot topic in Austria too: while organisations such as the “Friends of Nature” or “Bike Lobby” demand a general opening of forest trails and footpaths to mountain bikers, others such as the Austrian Forestry Association have been collecting

signatures against it.

The debate has also surfaced in Switzerland, where analyses have been carried out in the Müstair Valley, now published as “Planning Tools for Hiking and Mountain Biking in Mountain Areas”.

Hanspeter Mair, DAV Director for Huts, Nature Conservation and Area Planning, is of the opinion that “mountain sports and nature conservation are not necessarily contradictory”. He states: “With good will on all sides, conflicts can be avoided and a common line found.”

Source and further information: www.alpenverein.de/natur-umwelt/dav-veroeffentlicht-positions-papier-zum-thema-mountainbike-mountainbike-position-des-dav_aid_16053.html (de), www.tageszeitung.it/2015/05/10/das-mountainbike-verbot/ (de), www.haupt.ch/Planungsinstrumente-fuer-Wandern-und-Mountainbiking-in-Berggebieten.html (de), www.sicherheitfueralleimwald.at/ (de)

European tourism prize for Bohinj



Slow mobility: Bohinj has since December been a “European Destination of Excellence”. © Turizem-Bohinj

Ski buses and the ski train, well maintained cycle ways, bicycle hire and a visitor pass offering free bus travel – these and other sustainability measures led the jury to award the 2015 EDEN innovation prize in the slow mobility category to the town of Bohinj, Slovenia. EDEN stands for “European Destinations of Excellence” and was initiated in 2008 by the European Commission in order to promote sustainable models for tourism in Europe. An annual competition is held to acknowledge outstanding travel destinations. With over 350 members from 27 European countries, EDEN is the world’s largest network for sustainable tourism. Following Monte Isola in Italy, Bohinj is the second destination in the Alps to receive the innovation prize.

There is another network in the Alps that promotes soft tourism and is this year celebrating its tenth anniversary: “Alpine Pearls”. When it began in January 2006, its 17 member municipalities and their pilot projects for sustainable initiatives were seen as novelties. Nowadays the network is a sought-after partner for co-operative ventures and tourism conferences. The “Alpine Pearls” have in the last ten years managed to create a new awareness of sustainable tourism throughout Europe.

Source and further information: www.youredenexperience.com, ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/eden/index_en.htm, www.bohinj.si/si/novice/bohinj_eden_network (sl), <http://www.alpine-pearls.com/en/home.html>

Strange but true...

So they have introduced a “Tyrolean lass”, installing France’s longest zip line – in French a “*Tyrolienne*” – at the ski resort of La Colmiane. Visitors can descend, alone or in pairs, travelling at speeds of up 120 kilometres an hour. The ride lasts just one minute and 49 seconds, with thrill-seekers whizzing down a distance of 2.6 kilometres and arriving more or less gently 300 metres below – together with their ski gear, which is brought down via a sled system. Is this the future for skiing areas in these times of climate change? www.montagnenews.fr/article/une-tyrolienne-xxl-la-colmiane (fr), <https://www.departement06.fr/bons-plans/la-tyrolienne-de-la-colmiane-10156.html> (fr)

Agenda

Young Academics Award 2016 - "Greening the Economy in the Alps", 25.01. - 30.04.2016, online, Organisation: Alpine Convention. [More...](#)

Presentation conference of the Fifth Report on the State of the Alps, 10.02.2016, Brussels/BE, Organisation: Italian Delegation to the Alpine Convention. [More...](#)

World Sustainable Energy Days, 24.02. - 26.02.2016, Wels/AT, Organisation: ÖÖ Energiesparverband. [More...](#)

European River Symposium, 03.03.2016, Vienna/AT, Organisation: IAWD/IRF, ICPDR, Wetlands International, INBO, ICPR, GWP, RAMSAR, WWF, EA UK. [More...](#)

Workshop "Wildlife and winter sport activities", 03.03. - 04.03.2016, Lecheraines/FR, Organisation: ALPARC. [More...](#)