

alpMedia Newsletter No. 1, Summary 8/2017 - 1/2018

Bogs – a way out of the climate swamp



Wonders of nature: bogs protect drinking water, climate and biodiversity. © Peter Salzmann

One hectare of bog can store as much CO₂ as a car produces in a year. The Alps suffer from some of the world's heaviest traffic – yet fewer and fewer intact bogs remain.

The draining of bogs to extract peat or for farming, housing and roadbuilding purposes goes back centuries. The recognition that the destruction of these fragile ecosystems has serious consequences for biodiversity and climate came just a few decades ago. The Ramsar Convention was adopted in 1975 as the first international instrument for the protection of wetlands; it has been ratified by all the Alpine countries. Yet we cannot today speak of the functioning protection of wetlands. Figures from Germany, Austria and Switzerland show that 90 percent of the original bog areas in the Alps have already been destroyed. Many of the remaining wetlands are in a precarious state.

According to Elisabeth Sötz of WWF Austria, these fragile ecosystems are today once more under increasing pressure. Bogs in the Alps were largely spared where pressure for their use was low, for example in remote valleys. «But now, with decreasing snowfall at lower altitudes, such sites are increasingly falling victim to the extension of ski areas or to the construction of new basins and reservoirs.» The soil protection protocol contained in the Alpine Convention attempts to bring the various usage demands in line with other economic and environmental needs. She believes that this may help correct decisions to be made in such cases.

Research and civil society in the lead

Where legal frameworks and policy measures fall short, there is an especial need to support innovative ideas in civil society and in research. One example are the «bog certificates»: their purchase allows businesses or individuals to improve their own greenhouse gas performance for the benefit of endangered bog sites. Bog certificates, already offered in some European countries for years, are now available in the Alps. Science too is increasingly addressing the issues concerning bogs: the expression «paludiculture» is currently an umbrella term where opportunities are investigated for the agricultural use of original or re-established wetlands.

The concept of ecosystem services in turn helps to raise awareness of the environmental, economic, social and cultural value of wetlands. An intact bog acts not just as a carbon sink but also stores water. No other type of Alpine soil can hold as much water as marshland. Whether in the ever more frequent dry periods, or during heavy rains, bogs regulate the water balance and also play a vital role in purifying groundwater and drinking water. They are also hotspots of biodiversity and can be used by people as leisure and recreational areas.

Links and further information:

www.bundesforste.at/uploads/publikationen/Studie_Moore_im_Klimawandel_2010_01.pdf(de), Stöcklin et al. 2007: Landnutzung und biologische Vielfalt in den Alpen (de), www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/de/home/themen/biodiversitaet/publikationen-studien/publikationen/zustand-entwicklung-moore.html (de, fr), www.umweltnetz-schweiz.ch/themen/naturschutz/2704-zustand-der-moore.html (de), www.bmub.bund.de/fileadmin/Daten_BMU/Pool/Forschungsdatenbank/fkz_3715_71_201_bodenschutz_alpenkonvention_bf.pdf(de), www.moorfutures.de (de), www.mland.de (de), www.wsl.ch/de/projekte/klimaschutz-durch-hochmoorschutz.html (de), https://naturwissenschaften.ch/organisations/biodiversity/publications/informations_biodiversity_switzerland/search_details?_id=1433&_ga=2.111847235.616790399.1517212817-342207699.1517212817 (de, fr), www1.wdr.de/mediathek/video/sendungen/planet-wissen-swr/video-das-moor-kulturlandschaft-und-klimafaktor-100.html (de), www.bfn.de/themen/biotop-und-landschaftsschutz/moorschutz/okosystemleistungen.html (de)

Point of view: Skiing, adieu!



Katharina Conradin, President of CIPRA International © Martin Walser

Winter is here and in many ski resorts the snow cannons are running at full blast. Yet the number of skiers is in decline, making it hard to justify the immense investments made with the aim of expanding ski areas. It is time to realise that skiing is not a business model with a future, says Katharina Conradin, President of CIPRA International.

The numbers of first entrants in ski resorts in Switzerland are considerably down – by more than a third in the past 25 years. In Italy too the trend is clearly downward while, compared to 1995, one third fewer Austrians go skiing as did in the mid-1990s. Growth is only possible by wooing guests away from other ski areas. The consequence of this is that a quarter to a third of all ski resorts in the Alps are today running at a deficit. Meagre snowfall in recent winters has simply made the situation worse.

It seems all the more absurd, then, that every year hundreds of millions of euros are still being invested in the expansion of ski resorts: from the planned link between the Ötztal and Pitztal ski areas in Austria, all the way to Sudelfeld in Germany, Andermatt-Sedrun in Switzerland, and Les Vans in France, the planners have numerous projects stashed away. Many are now once more being dusted off, as CIPRA has [highlighted](#). A long-standing legal dispute regarding the Riedberger Horn in Bavaria was settled just last december – to the detriment of nature, and bereft of any financial reason.

But the more is invested in skiing, the more difficult it becomes to call a halt. Because, at a certain point, the ski circus becomes «too big to fail». And because what cannot happen may not be allowed to happen, governments or municipalities leap into the breach and assume the deficit, thus contributing to the risk of public debt.

Yet we are not only building over the mountains with these investments – we are building over our own future. Because all the money that is now being invested in the expansion of ski areas is unavailable for developing sustainable projects that look beyond energy-guzzling, landscape-blighting winter tourism. It is not acceptable that we continue as before simply because we are too blind to imagine a future without skiing! It is time to rethink and plan for a future in the Alps without ski lifts – a future that is based upon collective, holistic principles and regional strategies, as outlined in the CIPRA position paper [«Solstice in winter tourism»](#).

How intact ecosystems improve our quality of life



Forests protect us against avalanches, landslides and rock falls. Planken/LI © Norman Nigsch

Nature provides us with enormous benefits. The AlpES project draws on the concept of ecosystem services in order to record these in the Alpine regions and increase their appreciation.

Springs that provide clean drinking water, trees that ensure a pleasant microclimate in the city, or simply the views of a landscape that prompts us to dream – all of these goods and services can be categorised under the concept of ecosystem services. In the Alpine space too, ecosystem services make a significant contribution to the local quality of life. The AlpES project is devoted to Alpine ecosystem services and aims to strengthen their importance and appreciation in regional and trans-national environmental policies. This aim is currently being implemented in certain selected test regions. In Liechtenstein one focus is on the protective function of forests against avalanches, mudslides and rock falls. Heike Summer of Liechtenstein's Office for the Environment highlights the particular importance of this ecosystem service for the Principality: «A large proportion of our forests are located on hillsides. Intact protective forests therefore make an indispensable contribution to reducing the potential for damage, both in the Rhine Valley and in mountain regions, as well as reducing the need to construct additional technical measures.» The experiences and results from Liechtenstein and other Alpine regions will next be collected and fed into a WebGIS. AlpES is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund via the INTERREG Alpine Space programme. CIPRA is responsible for the project's external communications on behalf of the Office for the Environment and Land Management of the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Sources and further information:

www.alpine-space.eu/projects/alpes, www.alpes-webgis.eu

Solutions for borderless commuter mobility

Traffic jams, convoy controls, fine dust pollution and the Brenner base tunnel: while the problems of transit and goods traffic accumulate on political agendas, commuter cars remain stuck in queues.

Only 4% of all daily commuter traffic across the Swiss border is by means of public transport. The results: congested roads, noise and air pollution. But it is not just the major cities of Salzburg or Geneva that are affected, but for the most part rural areas, such as Italy's Vinschgau Valley or the Alpine Rhine Valley on the border between Austria and Switzerland.



Mobility made easy – thanks to integrated timetables and ticket systems. © STA/Bramezza

The project «Cross-Border Mobility in the Alpine Region» addresses precisely this problem. The aim is to record the regional, cross-border commuter flows and to develop solutions with the stakeholders involved through collaborative efforts. It is important to make the step down from the national level to supra-regional and local exchanges so as to adapt infrastructures, ticket systems and timetables, and not simply let them end at their respective borders. The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (Eusalp) is thus seen as an opportunity to enhance cross-border combinations of different modes of transport, thus improving commuter flows in the Alpine region as a whole. The project will be co-financed with European Union funds.

Sources and further information:

[www.20min.ch/schweiz/news/story/Hier-schlagen-Bahn-und-Bus-das-Auto-26154414\(de\)](http://www.20min.ch/schweiz/news/story/Hier-schlagen-Bahn-und-Bus-das-Auto-26154414(de)), [www.br.de/nachrichten/oberbayern/inhalt/studie-immer-mehr-pendler-in-muenchen-100.html\(de\)](http://www.br.de/nachrichten/oberbayern/inhalt/studie-immer-mehr-pendler-in-muenchen-100.html(de)), [www.vinschgawind.it/politik-vinschgaw-suedtirol/aktuelles-lokales-politik-gesellschaft-vinschgaw-suedtirol/9483-arbeiten-schweiz-suedtirol-grenzpendler-mals\(de\)](http://www.vinschgawind.it/politik-vinschgaw-suedtirol/aktuelles-lokales-politik-gesellschaft-vinschgaw-suedtirol/9483-arbeiten-schweiz-suedtirol-grenzpendler-mals(de)), www.cipra.org/en/transport/activities, www.alpine-region.eu

What now for the Alpine strategy?



Günther Platter, Governor of Tyrol/AT, presents the programme of the Tyrolean Eusalp presidency in Innsbruck. © CIPRA

Since January, the Austrian federal state of Tyrol has been chairing the European strategy for the Alps. This year will see a decision on how the strategy will be implemented in practice.

Today, February 7th 2018, the federal state of Tyrol is inviting participants to the kick-off event in the Austrian city of Innsbruck to mark the beginning of a decisive year. The European Strategy for the Alpine Region (Eusalp) was unveiled two years ago and today, following Slovenia and Bavaria, Tyrol will be the third state to take over the presidency. Yet many questions remain unanswered. Last year above all saw the various stakeholders coming together and familiarising themselves with the processes. This year will show how the Alpine strategy is to be implemented.

Mobility, education and the labour market, natural resources, natural hazards, energy: Tyrol has set out its substantive priorities for Eusalp, with a particular focus on traffic, notably the transfer of freight from road to rail. Transalpine freight traffic on the autobahn over the Brenner Pass has significant effects on this part of Austria, but the interests involved are controversial.

Andreas Pichler, director of CIPRA International, stresses that: «Eusalp reflects different interests that are not always compatible. Compromise is vital.» He fears that the proponents of short-term growth will prevail, a point that CIPRA drew attention to with its open letter in autumn of 2017.

Society – especially young people – should represent the foundation of a democratically based, active strategy. With the involvement of young people in its 2017 annual forum, the Eusalp consortium has now made a first step towards such participation.

In 2018, in addition to Eusalp, Austria is also chairing the Alpine Convention and will take over the EU presidency for the second half of the year. Direct ways do not however automatically lead to more co-operation, observes Peter Hasslacher, President of CIPRA Austria: «So far, we have not seen any co-ordinating activities. The implementation of the protocol concerning nature protection and landscape conservation is still awaiting ratification by the EU, for example.»

Sources and further information:

[www.tirol.gv.at/tirol-europa/eu-alpenstrategie/\(de\)](http://www.tirol.gv.at/tirol-europa/eu-alpenstrategie/(de)), [www.cipra.org/de/positionen/offener-brief-eusalp-generalversammlung-im-november-2017\(de,fr,it,sl\)](http://www.cipra.org/de/positionen/offener-brief-eusalp-generalversammlung-im-november-2017(de,fr,it,sl)), [www.tt.com/politik/landespolitik/13540083-91/tirol-will-lkw-kollaps-in-alpen-verhindern.csp\(de\)](http://www.tt.com/politik/landespolitik/13540083-91/tirol-will-lkw-kollaps-in-alpen-verhindern.csp(de)), www.alpine-region.eu, www.alpconv.org/en/convention/protocols/Documents/protokoll_naturschutzGB.pdf

Prospects for young people



Koroška offers excellent quality of life – but young people need more than clean air, lush forests and crystal-clear rivers. © koroška.si

Like many other rural areas, the Koroška region of northern Slovenia also has to battle against depopulation. Various measures and ideas now aim to persuade young people to stay.

Some 15 percent of the population of Koroška are aged between 15 and 29 years. Most have to move to the cities or abroad in order to go into higher education – and many qualified young people never return. As 25 year-old Ana, who lives in Koroška and is currently completing a master's degree in Ljubljana, puts it: «There is a lack of infrastructure, for instance a well-developed road network or better public transport, as well as a shortage of jobs for highly qualified people. I want to stay in the region, but young people need support in developing their ideas and in their working and living situations.»

The government and regional agencies such as RRA Koroška have now taken various measures to improve living conditions for young people. «We have introduced a regional scholarship scheme», says Jasmina Pungartnik of RRA Koroška. «Half of the scholarships are funded from the economy while future employers, the state and the EU pay for the other half.» Another measure is the «Koroška Business Incubator Network (MPIK)», a support programme for young entrepreneurs. Municipalities too are looking for solutions, for example implementing changes in land-use planning to make it easier for young people to build houses, as well as offering loans and nonprofit housing. At an event held in late January, young people also discussed the opportunities of digitisation and the possibility of developing Koroška into Slovenia's very own «Silicon Valley».

Sources and further information:

[www.vecer.com/za-mlade-na-koroskem-tudi-zazidljive-parcele-6378797\(sl\)](http://www.vecer.com/za-mlade-na-koroskem-tudi-zazidljive-parcele-6378797(sl)), [www.europedirect.si/sl/novica/razprava-eu-si-ti-digitalno-gospodarstvo-priloznost-za-korosko\(sl\)](http://www.europedirect.si/sl/novica/razprava-eu-si-ti-digitalno-gospodarstvo-priloznost-za-korosko(sl)), www.rra-koroska.si/en, www.mpiik-koroska.si/en

Poisoned playgrounds



Demands for a pesticide-free South Tyrol are growing stronger. © CIPRA Südtirol

A study proves the presence of pesticides on children's playgrounds in South Tyrol. The provincial government has taken up a defensive posture.

The study, commissioned by the Association for Nature and Environmental Protection, aims to clarify the extent to which public places in the Italian province of South Tyrol are contaminated with pesticides. Children's playgrounds have since 2009 been deemed by law as sensitive areas that deserve special protection from pesticides. Grass samples taken in May 2017 – the height of the spraying season – however show that 29 of the 71 children's playgrounds examined were contaminated with one or more pesticides. The concentrations found were in part above the EU's maximum permissible residue values for foodstuffs.

The results suggest that the regulations governing quantity and distance in South Tyrol are insufficient for the pesticides used and that people are unwittingly coming into contact with pesticides, not only in children's playgrounds but in other places too. According to Andreas Riedl, executive director of the Association for Nature and Environmental Protection as well as of CIPRA South Tyrol, the South Tyrolean provincial authorities have played down the results of the study, rather than seeing them as grounds for change. He summarises the situation thus: «The provincial authorities have reacted defensively and attempted to trivialise the issue. We are not seeking to apportion blame with this study but rather to show that

solutions are required.»

South Tyrol has for years been in the headlines owing to the widespread use of pesticides in fruit-growing. The municipality of Mals received international attention around a year ago when it decided, following a citizens' initiative, to ban the use of pesticides. Equally, South Tyrolean environmental organisations have for years been trying to convince the authorities that pesticide-free farming is the only future-oriented, sustainable path to follow. This is not just a matter of the contamination of sensitive zones or the protection of biodiversity and soils. In Riedl's view, «being pesticide-free would be a unique selling point that would distinguish us both as an agricultural and a tourist region». The urgency of such a change is illustrated by the Munich Environmental Institute with its campaign «Pesticide Tyrol». This is a reaction to the advertising, widespread in Germany, promoting South Tyrol as a tourist destination, with reworked posters of the «Tourist Land of South Tyrol» drawing attention to the use of pesticides in the province.

Sources and further information:

www.umwelt.bz.it/aktuelles/presse/pestizide-sensible-zonen-sind-nicht-ausreichend-gesch%C3%BCtzt.html (de, it), www.provinz.bz.it/news/de/news.asp?news_action=4&news_article_id=599844 (de), wundervonmals.com/tag/pestizide (de), www.br.de/br-fernsehen/sendungen/unkraut/themen-nach-rubriken/regionales-gesundes/suedtiroler-dorf-mals-kaempft-gegen-pestizide-100.html (de), www.handelskammer.bz.it/de/was-w%C3%A4re-s%C3%BCdtirol-ohne-seinen-tourismus (de, it), <https://pestizidtirol.info> (de)

Awards for attractive, well-built constructions



The Constructive Alps jury awarded top marks in every area to the newly built primary school in the Austrian municipality of Brand.
© Caroline Begle

At the end of October 2017 in Bern, Switzerland, Constructive Alps crowned the winning projects, demonstrating that Alpine architecture can not only be pleasing on the eye, but sustainable too.

The aim of the competition, being held last year for the fourth time, was to promote sustainable construction projects across the Alpine region. The 261 submissions from every Alpine country were scrutinised by an international jury which, in addition to architectural quality, leaned heavily towards a holistic, sustainable approach. Consideration was accordingly given in the assessment not only to energy aspects, but also to the social and economic added value of the projects.

The jury decided that the newly built primary school in the Austrian municipality of Brand merited first place: it offered timeless architecture adapted to its surroundings, the consistent use of wood – an important local resource – and a very good energy balance. Joint second place was awarded to two projects in Austria (in Salzburg and Carinthia), while next came Italy with a project from Trentino. «The projects show how, in a sensitive region like the Alps, it is possible to build in a way that is at the same time both considerate and innovative», says Köbi Gantenbein, head juror and editor-in-chief of the *Hochparterre* publishing house, highlighting the strengths of the award-winning projects.

The architecture award is sponsored by Switzerland and Liechtenstein, with CIPRA International providing technical and organisational support. A publication in the *Hochparterre* magazine and a touring exhibition on Constructive Alps offer those interested the opportunity to find out more about

the projects. Until the end of February 2018 the exhibition will be hosted at the Alpine Museum in Bern, Switzerland, which was also the venue for the awards ceremony held in late October 2017.

Further information:

www.constructivealps.net (de, fr, sl, it), www.hochparterre.ch/nachrichten/architektur/blog/post/detail/vorbildlich-am-berg/1508329989/ (de)

Oh...



© Marianne Bevis_flickr

When cows are chosen as beauty queens, bulging udders are seen as the ultimate attraction. But some dairy farmers are resorting to unfair means – much to the chagrin of the animals themselves. The Swiss authorities have now responded and have prohibited the straightening or blocking of the teats with glue. Ever more elaborate means are nevertheless being used to enhance the natural beauty of beasts. In Saudi Arabia, for example, around a dozen camels were banned from participating in the «Miss Camel» contest: their owners were accused of having injected their animals with neurotoxins such as Botox and collagen. Plump lips and a big nose are intended to sway the jury – while the prize money of several million dollars is also an obvious reason for doing this. Perhaps such practices will soon be visited upon cattle too?

Sources and further information:

www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/saudi-camel-beauty-festival-12-entrants-disqualified-for-botox-use-1.698068, www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/Bis-das-Euter-beinahe-platzt/story/10174510 (de)

Agenda

Young Academics Award 2018 - Sustainable water management in the Alps,
01.07.2017 - 31.05.2018, The Alps, Organisation: Alpine convention. [More...](#)

Arco alpino 2018, 9. - 10.02.2018, Trento. [More...](#)

World Sustainable Energy Days, 28.02. - 02.03.2018, Wels/AT. [More...](#)

10th World Congress on Snow and Mountain Tourism, 21. - 23.3.2018, Andorra. [More...](#)