

Spaces for Climate Protection

CIPRA's Demands on Spatial Planning

The Alps are different. The Alpine range is characterized by special features that need to be taken into account in spatial development and climate protection.

⇒ The percentage of land that can be settled is very limited due to the natural landscape. For example, in Tyrol it is only 8% of the land. It is mainly natural hazards that limit the amount of settlement space that can be populated permanently. An increase of natural hazards as a consequence of climate change could restrict the space available for permanent settlement even more.

The settlement of the Alps is widely dispersed. For this reason, public services can only be provided incurring high costs, time, funding and personnel. In areas affected by a high rate of out-migration, it will become increasingly harder to guarantee services for everyone.

⇒ Forward-looking spatial planning prepares the way for a future in which fossil fuels such as petroleum and diesel will become increasingly scarcer. Rising energy prices are an additional burden for people that live in the rural peripheral regions of the Alps. Increasing commuting allowances does not help climate protection at all. Rather, the issue here is to make the rural areas fit for survival in the post-fossil fuel era.

In the rural peripheral areas twice as many people use cars as main mode of transport than in cities. Automobile traffic can only be reduced if settlements have a minimum size and density and it is economically feasible to connect them to public transport networks.

CIPRA demands:

(1) Take account of risks!

According to all experts, climate change will raise natural hazards such as storms, avalanches and flooding. In order to prepare for this, all Alpine regions need to prepare binding risk plans. Building should not be permitted in risky zones; new building zones should only be permitted if there are risk plans and these do not contradict building.

(2) Higher density instead of sprawl!

Compact, densely built-up cities and towns have a lot of advantages. Mobility can be organized by public transport means, and moreover, it is economically feasible to offer environmentally friendly distance heating and cooling. Instead of rural sprawl that eats away at the landscape, densely built-up settlements should be promoted. Financial aid for businesses should favour locations that customers and employees can reach by public transport and where goods can be transported by rail.

(3) Regional cycles!

Regional markets and economies should be promoted, because they organize the production and consumption of goods using less environmentally-damaging transport. Subsidies should not be granted indiscriminately throughout regions. Instead, small centres that provide basic services to the surrounding areas should receive higher funding within the scope of revenue equalization among the territorial authorities. Regionalization lowers motorized transport and the emission of climate-damaging gases.

(4) Think in larger spatial dimensions!

Often, more than one municipality within one valley works without coordinating its actions with the others and each pursues goals that only serve individual purposes. There is no coordination as regards climate protection at all. The scopes of competence need to be transferred from the smallest communal levels to a higher level. Geographically-related municipalities should plan spatial developments together and also have joint responsibility. Potential conflicts could be arbitrated by higher-ranking mediation bodies. Shrinkage scenarios must also be provided for, because it is obvious that there are areas in Alpine regions with population out-migration. This process needs to be accompanied intelligently and ameliorated socially.

(5) Give the wilderness a chance!

Not all regions settled today will be retained. This would also have some advantages if people were to migrate out of some peripheral areas of the Alps in the coming generations. Biological diversity increases in areas in which natural forests are permitted to grow back, because permanent human settlements have been given up permanently. And this is directly useful for climate protection, because such areas bind more carbon dioxide (CO₂) than built-up areas. Therefore, they should be rewarded in revenue equalization to socially amortize structural changes in peripheral areas.

(6) Energy change!

The Alps need to prepare for the time after the oil age. Renewable energy sources are crucial for climate protection – the future belongs to them. Forward-looking spatial planning must take this into account. It should consistently promote low-energy building methods, define climate neutral pilot regions and reserve enough areas for photovoltaic and wind power – but without damaging nature or landscape.

(7) Make room for the sun!

Building codes should define the location and orientation of buildings in such a manner to optimally use the sun for heating, hot water production and electricity production. Whenever it harmonizes with landscape protection, zones should be marked for wind power and geothermal power.

(8) Truth in costs must prevail!

The expenses of developing building land that needs infrastructure for transport, technical and social facilities increases the greater the rural sprawl. The true costs must be borne by the property owners. The public sector should cease such veiled subsidization of construction that is damaging to the climate.

Schaan, November 2009