

Make the Alps energy self-sufficient!

CIPRA-demands – Energy self-sufficient regions

Not having to depend on energy imports: this vision holds great fascination for many regions. Self-sufficiency is “in.” There are already many very positive approaches and examples of attempts to go down this road. At the heart of all the concepts is the idea of meeting demand through regional renewable sources of energy, saving energy and using energy more efficiently. Anyone who systematically takes this approach in an attempt to create an energy self-sufficient region changes the face of their region and its structures – to the benefit of their own economy, society and the environment.

Most regions that strive for energy self-sufficiency are motivated by the sustainability principle in its three dimensions. However, when it comes to fleshing out the theory with specifics, the economic and social aspects are often given priority whereas the ecological dimension tends to be given second-rate treatment. This problem becomes particularly obvious when conflicts of interest emerge between construction of facilities and nature protection issues, for example. But a region can only be classed as sustainable if the concerns of nature and landscape protection are also adequately taken into account.

CIPRA urges:

(1) The Alps must become energy self-sufficient.

There are already examples that illustrate that this aim can be achieved regionally by 2050. It is crucial that all levels of politics work towards this goal.

(2) Create climate-friendly jobs.

The path towards energy self-sufficiency is usually adopted when grants are available. For that reason, government funding must encourage the creation of jobs that have a positive effect on the climate. Start-up financing for energy self-sufficient regions is a good way of doing this: it creates jobs and increases the value added in the region.

(3) The vision of energy self-sufficiency is all-embracing.

It includes not only opting for renewables sources of energy, but also efficient, economical and innovative use of energy. Spatial planning and transport are core elements of this vision.

(4) Get everyone on board.

Reorganising the regions in this way needs good climate governance: the general public and all key interest groups must be involved in the decision-making and implementation processes. Sustainability concepts can only be successful if they enjoy broad-based acceptance.

(5) Don't leave transport out of the picture.

Its energy consumption is high. But that can be reduced through spatial planning concepts. Promoting public transport and slower forms of transport, such as pedestrian and bicycle transport, smoothes the way for energy self-sufficiency.

(6) Do not act against the interests of nature.

Renewable energy is important and creates jobs. But energy self-sufficiency must not be misused as a pretext for building hydro schemes that spoil the beauty of the last semi-natural water bodies or for covering large areas of untouched nature with wind turbines and solar power stations.

(7) Research energy self-sufficiency.

There is still a lack of empirical data and scientific studies. The process towards becoming an energy self-sufficient region must be accompanied by national and transnational research to ensure implementation is constantly improved.

Schaan, november 2010