

# Alpine landscape is not renewable!

## 1 Introduction

Today's landscape in the Alps is the result of a close relationship between human activities and natural developments. What we call landscape is the result of manifold interactions between ecological, social and cultural factors. CIPRA understands landscape not only in a geographical sense, but as a socially and culturally shaped, personal and communal perception of the environment. Landscape is understood as the result of social action and perception, which is interrelated with those who act and perceive. It thus refers also to the European Landscape Convention.

Landscape also acts as a mediator of physical experience. This experience is not exclusive, but open to all. The users and beneficiaries of landscape are not necessarily its owners. Landscape is also cultural heritage, a manifestation of collective history. Likewise, landscape serves to secure living space and provides vital resources, so-called ecosystem services. Furthermore, it is indispensable for the promotion and protection of biodiversity.

Landscape is a key to negotiating social and political issues. CIPRA has taken up these issues as part of its Alpine-wide priority theme "Landscape" 2019-2020. This position paper, which was developed in a broad and participatory process with CIPRA representatives, young Alpine women and experts from all Alpine countries, is the conclusion of this priority theme.

In its structure, the position paper takes up the heterogeneous mosaic of (Alpine) landscapes. It shows the requirements to understand and preserve the formative elements of this landscape mosaic. CIPRA's approach to landscape is shaped by the two principles of "landscape as commons" and "negotiating landscape" (Chapter 2). The five following demands (Chapter 3) relate to specific landscape uses that are particularly characteristic of the landscape. These are: (3.1) undeveloped landscapes, (3.2) agriculture, (3.3) energy, (3.4) recreation and (3.5) urbanisation. It is precisely in dealing with the undeveloped landscapes that Alpine societies have a great responsibility, as they are rare throughout Europe. For each of the five positions, the trends and challenges are described from CIPRA's point of view. The demands derived from this point the way to sustainable development in the Alps.

## 2 Principles

**CIPRA regards landscape as a commons and calls for landscape policy to be negotiated in participatory processes.**

### 2.1 Landscapes as commons

In the Alps there is a long tradition of shared management and use of commons such as pastures, water or forests. The landscape as such can be considered as a commons – simply translated as common property. The term "commons", however, goes beyond the common good: commons are what we produce "together", what is made available to the public or what we receive as gifts from nature. This includes material and immaterial aspects as well as the

social relations that produce, maintain and protect commons. The commons also includes rules and norms that create important incentives and framework conditions for collective action.

Understanding the Alpine landscape as a commons enables a stimulating and beneficial relationship between humans and nature that will ensure human survival and promote collective and natural values. In this way, the mountain landscape serves as a kind of laboratory for commons and deliberative democracy<sup>1</sup>; for being human in times of climate crisis and species extinction.

Crucial to this are the practices and processes of how commons are produced, used and managed. For example, terraces, irrigation systems or alpine pastures were created and used collectively. As a result, landscapes were constantly changing.

If we understand landscapes as commons in this sense, it becomes clear that the rules for dealing with the landscape must also adapt to a changing, pluralistic society. For example, landscape-related discussions must increasingly include women, young people and immigrants. A large part of the land area of the Alps is owned by the general public: who may and should decide how this landscape should develop? Often, specific local rules have to be considered – for example, when it comes to the creation of a new national park: in this case, who is allowed to decide on the “use” of this common good, whose impact goes far beyond the borders? Knowledge about commons and their value must become common property. Commons must be culturally anchored and made visible in legislation.

In the Alps, there are numerous “new” commons related to landscape, such as food culture or solidarity-based agriculture. In order for these approaches to take effect and be further developed, it is necessary to take into account Elinor Ostrom’s<sup>2</sup> principles for the management of common property.

## **2.2 Negotiating landscape**

Landscape is a reflection of different, constantly changing social needs and interests. It is important to coordinate these needs and interests in a transparent way. It is obvious that when decisions are made on how to deal with the landscape, the interests of protecting the environment, biodiversity, climate and water are not sufficiently taken into account and instead economic interests are often given priority (cf. 3.1 Undeveloped landscapes).

Good landscape policy is a pathway to participation so that civil society, private organisations and public authorities recognise the value of the landscape, its role in society and the often dramatic changes due to human activities. At the same time, it is a means of setting objectives for the management of the landscape. A meaningful landscape policy that is fit for the future must provide effective instruments for the participation of the public and their various interests. It must ensure that the interests in conserving our natural resources – which are all part of the landscape – are given as much weight as the interests of economic development. Policies must therefore also ensure that landscape quality indicators, such as biodiversity, landscape appearance or soil health, do not deteriorate further.

To this end, existing regulations – such as the European Landscape Convention or the Alpine Convention – must be consistently applied and implemented. The former provides for the signatory states to adopt a landscape policy and to reduce competition between the

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<sup>1</sup> The term deliberative democracy refers both to concepts in which public deliberation is central and to their practical implementation. The essential characteristic of deliberative democracy is public discourse on all political issues, also known as “deliberation”. Wikipedia, “Deliberative democracy”, accessed 2.11.2020.

<sup>2</sup> Elinor Ostrom (1990): *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Ostrom received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009 for her academic work on the commons.

competences of the decision-making bodies. The Alpine Convention, as a binding set of rules for the Alpine states, obliges the contracting parties to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection, maintenance and restoration of nature and landscape in the Alpine region<sup>3</sup>. They are also required to harmonise the use of space with ecological goals and requirements and to use resources and space sparingly and in an environmentally compatible manner<sup>4</sup>.

In view of the important socio-political role of landscapes, CIPRA calls for the promotion of education and awareness-raising in the field of landscape. When people feel affected and are involved, they take responsibility for their surroundings. They learn to recognise and react, not only to abrupt, but also to gradual changes to the landscape. Sustainable development becomes concrete and tangible.

CIPRA calls for the involvement of the public, local and regional authorities and other interest groups in order to sensitise civil society, private organisations and authorities to the values of the landscape and its role in society. Processes need to be defined for inclusion in landscape policy, as stipulated in the European Landscape Convention.

### **3 Trends and challenges**

#### **3.1 Undeveloped landscapes**

The Alps are often perceived as wild and undeveloped landscapes. However, a clear distinction between developed and undeveloped spaces is hardly possible; there are numerous landscapes in between that are partly developed and at the same time have great natural value. These rarely have sufficient protection status.

#### **Trends and challenges**

Currently, in many places a process for the massive development of little or undeveloped areas is underway – for example with roads, cable cars or energy infrastructures – and thus a devaluation of the landscapes that shape our view of these Alps. The more landscapes are developed, the more the value of undeveloped landscapes becomes apparent, be it from an ecological point of view for the preservation of biodiversity, from an economic point of view as an attractive space for tourism, or from a social point of view in terms of generational justice and as a space for experience. At the same time, there are shrinking regions from which people are migrating: these landscapes, some of which have been shaped by human hand for centuries, are gradually being left to their own devices.

#### **Demands**

Undeveloped spaces are indispensable, especially from an ecological point of view, as they represent important areas of retreat and potential for wilderness and biodiversity. Undeveloped spaces are also indispensable elements for landscape aesthetics. Due to their importance for the common good and nature in the Alps, these landscapes are absolutely worth preserving. Regulatory interventions are necessary to stop their progressive development.

Spatial and landscape planning encompasses numerous instruments that are used differently in the various Alpine countries. In order for planning to be effective, orderly and forward-looking, the data basis on undeveloped landscapes in the Alpine region must first be improved and, if possible, standardised. On the basis of this data, CIPRA calls for the existing regulations

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<sup>3</sup> Protocol “Nature Conservation and Landscape Management”, [www.alpconv.org](http://www.alpconv.org)

<sup>4</sup> Protocol “Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development”, [www.alpconv.org](http://www.alpconv.org)

to be put to the test in the spirit of the Alpine Convention<sup>5</sup> and, if necessary, improved. The aim is to protect sparsely and non-developed landscapes and the associated potential for free nature development. In accordance with the EU's net-zero target<sup>6</sup> for land consumption, it is also necessary to evaluate how the use of new land can be reduced. In the Alpine states, there is a considerable need to catch up in this respect.

Processes in regions affected by migration must also be accompanied by forward-looking spatial planning. It takes courage to question whether the current level of settlement in the Alps can be maintained everywhere while, on the other hand, people in these valleys who want to preserve the evolved cultural landscape need support, encouragement and professional guidance to shape their lives in a shrinking region with self-empowerment.

### **3.2 Landscape and agriculture**

Agriculture strongly shapes the Alpine landscape in very different ways. On the one hand, there are many characteristic cultural landscapes such as terraces, vineyards, chestnut forests or pastures that have been created through centuries of agricultural use. On the other hand, intensive agriculture, which has found its way into the Alps via its monocultures, also shapes the landscape.

#### **Trends and challenges**

Agricultural landscapes in the Alps have undergone major changes in recent decades. More remote, less favourable locations are becoming overgrown with bushes and forests – not least because what is produced there can hardly keep up with global price competition. Not only are the open areas<sup>7</sup> that are important for biodiversity being lost, but also the cultural practices and artefacts associated with them: Paths, terraces, dry-stone walls, small stables and barns, all of which have shaped the Alpine landscape for centuries, are disintegrating. The situation is quite different in the more favoured areas: agriculture is intensified through the massive use of machinery, antibiotics, fertilisers and pesticides, as well as additional irrigation, with corresponding negative consequences for biodiversity and soil health. Nor too should livestock farming be forgotten: the increase in productivity in this sector is leading to the loss of traditional pasture farming, with corresponding negative impacts on animal welfare and the landscape. Subsidies to support agriculture have in some cases had seriously negative impacts on biodiversity, soil health and material cycles in all Alpine countries<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Demands**

It is imperative that intensive agriculture in the Alpine valleys be designed in a way that is more compatible with the environment and the landscape. Incentives are needed to promote biodiversity, soil health, animal welfare and the abandonment of pesticides that are particularly harmful to the environment<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Protocol on Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development: especially Art. 1c), 2c), 3c), 4(2), 8(4), 9(4); Protocol on Nature Conservation and Landscape Management; Protocol on Tourism: especially Art. 10; Protocol on Soil Protection: especially Art. 7

<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0571>

<sup>7</sup> The abandonment of Alpine areas that are used in ecologically responsible ways and their forestation leads to a loss of biodiversity in the short and medium term. However, longer-term observations show that free natural development and free natural dynamics – especially if large areas are made available – can definitely have a positive effect on species composition.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gubler, Ismail & Seidl 2020: Biodiversity-damaging subsidies in Switzerland. WSL issue 92, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Schiebel, A. (2017): Das Wunder von Mals.

Particularly valuable cultural landscapes must be recorded and protected, and their protection and preservation must be supported by the state. Especially in the Southern Alps, this process is hindered by small-scale ownership structures; these must be revised in line with the times.

Due to increasing economic pressure, agricultural buildings in the Alps are getting bigger and bigger – sometimes so big that even single buildings change the character of whole villages and landscapes. Agriculture that is compatible with the landscape must not stop at the borders of fields – buildings must also be integrated into the landscape.

An effective system of incentives must ensure that farms are rewarded for contributing to the conservation of cultural landscapes and their ecological and socio-economic functions through their activities or omissions. Services of general interest, especially those that benefit the cultural landscape and natural diversity, should be given priority in direct subsidies. For example, the ecologically sensible diversification of crops must also be economically worthwhile. High-quality small-scale production must be supported more effectively and given priority over mass production. Such principles and incentives must be enshrined in the EU's common agricultural policy<sup>10</sup> and, in parallel, in Swiss agricultural policy. In the EU agricultural policy at least, there is a tendency in this direction with the strategy "From Farm to Fork"<sup>11</sup>.

There is incredible potential especially in the consumption of agricultural products, which often have a direct connection to the Alpine landscape. Approaches that promote regional and sustainable consumption and identification with the Alpine landscape – such as solidarity-based agriculture – should definitely also be strengthened in the Alps.

Mountain agriculture needs strategies to become more innovative and resilient. A new, innovative generation of farmers should be supported and empowered to produce quality in a cost-covering manner and to get better access to the land and the market.

### **3.3 Landscape and energy**

The energy transition is vital: for climate protection, for reducing our consumption of non-renewable resources and for effective nature and species conservation. However, it also needs a massive increase in efficiency and sufficiency and a moderate expansion of renewable energies.

#### **Trends and challenges**

How many wind, hydro, biomass and solar plants need to be built for the energy transition and where do they need to be located? There is a risk that such plants will destroy the last remote and still untouched landscapes and sensitive ecosystems in the already intensively exploited Alps (cf. 3.1 "Undeveloped landscapes"). Together with increasing traffic, settlement pressure and ever more intensive recreational use, there is mounting pressure on landscape, flora and fauna.

#### **Demands**

In view of the effects of climate change, CIPRA fundamentally supports the call for an energy turnaround. However, this must ensure that the exceptional nature, biodiversity and unique landscapes of the Alps are not harmed; the energy transition must not be used to exploit the last unused resources in the Alps and thus damage landscapes. The first priority is to reduce energy consumption and to decouple energy consumption from social and economic growth.

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<sup>10</sup> Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/commonagricultural-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/commonagricultural-policy_en)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Farm to Fork Strategy [https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en)

CIPRA therefore calls for coordinated planning that defines both priority areas and exclusion areas. Since the effects of energy infrastructures such as hydroelectric or wind power do not stop at national borders, CIPRA considers it indispensable to introduce national planning as a minimum – and if possible Alpine-wide planning. Too much authority for spatial planning at low administrative levels will lead to uncoordinated development.

In protected areas, the energy infrastructure must not impair the central purpose of protection. In national parks, other higher-ranking protected areas, bird sanctuaries or areas with a high wilderness quality, energy infrastructure should be completely dispensed with. Consideration should also be given to the aesthetics of the landscape as well as to the protection of recreational areas. It is also important to consider not only the energy infrastructure in the narrower sense, but also to examine which infrastructures are necessary for construction and development.

In accordance with the provisions of the Energy Protocol of the Alpine Convention, environmentally compatible production, distribution and use of energy must also be enforced at the international level and energy-saving measures promoted. Reducing consumption through better energy efficiency and sufficiency measures must always have top priority.

### **3.4 Landscape and leisure**

Whether skiing, cross-country skiing, hiking, climbing, paragliding, canyoning or mountain biking – leisure activities in everyday life or while on holiday have an enormous impact on the landscape and influence its appearance. Leisure activities in turn shape our view of the Alpine landscape, whether as Alpine residents or as one of the millions of visitors. This view of the landscape is continuously reproduced through the media, where landscape is often presented as a backdrop for leisure and adventure.

#### **Trends and challenges**

The Alps are one of the most important tourism and leisure areas in Europe. The enormous diversity of landscapes and ecosystems allows for a wide variety of leisure activities. This makes the Alpine landscape vulnerable and at the same time a playground for short-term, selfish interests. It is in danger of being overused by the numerous demands placed upon it. In many places, the load limit has been reached or even exceeded. The rediscovery of little developed natural areas during the corona crisis threatens to affect further areas that were previously seldom used (cf. 3.1 “Undeveloped landscapes”).

Under what conditions can landscape and nature continue to be usable by all? Is there a need for access restrictions, in particular to sensitive areas, and how should these be negotiated? The answers to these questions reflect the cultural values that we attach to the landscape, such as recreation, leisure, memory or adventure.

#### **Demands**

Dealing with recreational landscapes requires the inclusion of all users: city dwellers, outdoor enthusiasts or recreation seekers, as well as the rural population living and working in the Alpine landscape or the multi-local population commuting between worlds. This by no means signifies that everyone can assert his or her interests. What is needed is a guided dialogue between the parties involved and steering measures for moderate tourism that will preserve the quality of the landscape and nature and be the best for the environment and nature, in the ideal case contributing to their improvement.

Both the quality of the dialogue and the results depend decisively on the quality of the urban-rural relationship and a willingness to assume and share responsibility. This requires awareness-raising measures. It is a question of getting to know, experience and appreciate the “unadorned” landscape better. This enables stakeholders to see that the value of the landscape and the loss of landscape quality is too high a price to pay for the pursuit of a hobby or short-term profit maximisation. The price of the landscape can be set monetarily, through bids or by making access more difficult. In any case, it must take into account social justice between current stakeholders and future generations.

New tourism infrastructures should only be built in areas that are already intensively used. Previously undeveloped areas and landscape chambers, on the other hand, should be protected from new infrastructure. CIPRA is also opposed to capacity expansions. When new leisure infrastructure is built or expanded, responsibility should be assumed as regards nature and the landscape, as well as for a high level of building culture.

Another central issue is how to deal with infrastructures in recreational landscapes that are no longer in use. With rising temperatures and decreasing snow reliability, many ski lifts are becoming redundant. CIPRA calls for the consistent dismantling of those facilities that are no longer needed.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.5 Urban landscapes**

Urban and densely populated areas are expanding, especially on the already heavily used valley floors. The problem of soil consumption is slowly entering public consciousness. In Austria, for example, consumption due to sealing and overbuilding was halved between 2010 and 2018<sup>13</sup>. However, twelve hectares of soil<sup>14</sup> are still “destroyed” there every day. This land consumption has negative consequences for biodiversity and soil functionality, has an unfavourable impact on the local climate and affects the quality of the landscape and the quality of life of the inhabitants. In addition, climate change has major impacts on settlement areas and transport infrastructures, whether in the form of rising temperatures, flooding or increasing slope instability. Furthermore, forms of spatial planning are needed that rely on transdisciplinarity and address complex challenges by combining social, ecological, financial and political approaches so as to create sustainable living spaces in cities (cf. 2.2 “Negotiating landscape”).

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. CIPRA position paper “Solstice in Winter Tourism”

<sup>13</sup> Umweltbundesamt (2019): Bodenverbrauch in Österreich. Status quo Bericht zur Reduktion des Bodenverbrauchs in Österreich.

<sup>14</sup> For comparison, this corresponds to around 17 football pitches.

## Trends and challenges

Climate change means that residents of Alpine cities suffer much more from heat in summer than those in rural areas. The building materials and the lack of green spaces and natural surroundings in cities further exacerbate this tendency. At the same time, urban landscapes also play an important role in protecting biodiversity. For example, insects often find more food and habitats in cities than in rural areas with large monocultures. In addition, green spaces offer opportunities to relax, meet other people, observe nature and participate in the social life of a city, e.g. through urban gardening projects.

Another challenge is the increasing number of empty buildings and flats in Alpine cities. This situation is exacerbated both by demographic change and new forms of housing, as well as by legal obstacles and speculation in the real estate market.

## Demands

CIPRA demands that cities and urban areas legally secure certain proportions of green spaces and demand that building regulations reflect these in new projects.

Cities also need to take more responsibility for nature within their boundaries – be it in terms of biodiversity, flood protection or adaptation to warmer temperatures. Green and blue infrastructures, i.e. green spaces and watercourses in cities, must be strengthened.

Green spaces in cities must rapidly become accessible to every inhabitant. Nature's ability to regulate temperatures and mitigate the negative effects of climate change must be much better integrated into urban planning strategies.

As long as there are still unused building land reserves in urban centres, no new land should be converted into building land. Before new buildings are constructed, existing empty buildings must be redeveloped and converted. This not only reduces land consumption and CO2 emissions, but will also create added value for existing neighbourhoods and villages.

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