

Rejuvenation of mountain farms



Fewer and fewer younger people are willing to inherit the running of small mountain farms. © Uwe Häntsch_flickr

Fewer and fewer young people want to become farmers. If no one is willing to inherit and take on the running of a farm, it will close. There is a lack of both recognition and incentives – from EU policy through to searching for partners.

As Rok Damijan, head of the Slovenian Young Farmers (ZSPM), puts it: «Once they leave the farm, they seldom come back.» Developments in Slovenia are similar to those in other Alpine countries: since 1980 more than half of all farms have been abandoned, many of them due to a lack of willing heirs. The downward trend is continuing, with small mountain farms in particular affected.

Mountain farming contributes both to local food security and environmental protection. It helps rural areas to develop and maintains the cultural heritage. In its «Mountain Farming» protocol, the Alpine Convention encourages account to be taken of these services. The EU's common agricultural policy in fact addresses mountain farming and has recently established its own support structure for young farmers. The incentives are however not sufficient to compensate for the disadvantages when compared to farming in the lowlands: topographical conditions are too difficult, available farmland is too limited in the area, and land prices are too high.

Money alone is not enough

In addition to financial support, strategies for regional production and marketing are needed alongside the international recognition of products from sustainable agriculture and small-scale farms – something that CIPRA has long been demanding. Additional impulses can be provided through co-operation with other sectors such as tourism, crafts, forestry and energy. Mountain agriculture has been best preserved in those areas of the Alps where tourist activities are strongest. Tourism offers the potential for additional income and the possibility of local marketing of products and services. Well-maintained farms and cultivated landscapes in turn foster tourism.

Mountain farming thrives better in vibrant rural areas. Damijan sees here opportunities for bringing together young people, one of the aims of the ZSPM. «We want to show people that they are not alone.» These meetings are also aimed at helping farmers find a partner. «It is easier to meet someone there who knows what living on a farm is like. Finding a partner is a major issue among young farmers.»

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Point of view: The Alpine community must not forget the refugees!



Francesco Pastorelli, Director of CIPRA Italy

While Eusalp wants to bring together the Alpine regions, migrants are dying on the borders between the Alpine countries. Francesco Pastorelli, Director of CIPRA Italy, asks what has happened to our hospitable, solidarity-based, tolerant Europe?

A young Nigerian woman died in a Turin hospital after she had brought her child into the world. The French police who had picked her up as she, along with other migrant women, had tried to cross from Italy into France at night in the snow on the Colle della Scala (Col de l'Échelle in French), brought her back to Italy and simply left her alone in the cold at Bardonecchia station.

A French mountain guide is being threatened with up to five years in prison because he helped a migrant woman, who was eight months pregnant, at the border crossing of Monginevro. In Bardonecchia itself police stormed a reception facility for refugees. Incidents of this kind are increasingly common at borders in the Alps.

While the Alpine regions are working on a unified Alps via the European Strategy for the Alps (Eusalp), the nation states are fencing themselves off. Where is the spirit of solidarity of the European Union? Can we, within the framework of the Alpine Convention, continue to address issues of the environment, landscape, transport and tourism, while in the cold snow of the Alpine border crossings people are risking their lives having faced great dangers crossing the desert or the sea? Solutions to the immigration problem are difficult to find; here is not the right place to decide on the distribution of refugees, or whether they should be accepted or rejected. But we cannot accept that people fleeing from war and hunger should encounter walls and barbed wire in the Alps, in wealthy Europe, that they do not receive help when in need; or that those who wish to help should be threatened with prosecution and prison. At the same time, small communities on the frontiers should not be left to handle the problem on their own.

Fortunately, there are various human rights organisations and local initiatives that are assisting refugees such as in Briançon in France or in Bardonecchia. Small mountain communities are helping as best they can: one example is Ostana which, with a population of only 80, has taken in six refugees from Pakistan.

Organisations active in the Alps such as CIPRA or the «Alliance in the Alps» network of municipalities are aware of the importance of a well-integrated, pluralistic and multicultural society in the Alps and are committed to this. We must not however limit ourselves to implementing international co-operation projects concerning social issues. We must open the eyes of those international institutions that have previously watched on passively or with indifference when faced with the dramatic events at the borders, making it clear that expressions of openness and welcome are often in reality frustrated by fear and reluctance.

The history of the Alps is marked by migrations. Whole generations of mountain dwellers have at times left their homelands out of necessity and sought their fortune in the lowlands, in industrial cities, in other countries and continents. Many have returned, rich in experience, skills, contacts and financial resources and have contributed to the development of their homeland. We can learn from their stories for the challenges of today.

Thinking ahead together



New ideas for society: CIPRA's 2017 Annual Report is dedicated to social innovation in the Alps. © Jenni Kuck

Sustainable development needs commitment on the part of society. With its theme of «Social Innovation», CIPRA International's 2017 Annual Report puts people at the centre of change.

The challenging situations that exist today in the Alps, such as a migration, climate change mitigation, mobility and the consumption of resources cannot be solved through technological progress alone; they also require social change. With its topic of «Social Innovation», CIPRA is tackling these challenges from a societal point of view and the potential that lies within society. The 2017 Annual Report sets out possible approaches.

With projects and initiatives on the core topics of «Nature and People», «Economy in Transition» and «Social Innovation», CIPRA International is adopting new approaches. For example, the I-LivAlps workshop in the Italian Valle Maira saw young adults discussing social innovation in the Alps with experts and national representatives. The Annual Report gives brief portraits of seven participants and shows what inspires them and how they personally are developing new ideas.

The national CIPRA representatives are also encouraging exchanges, with numerous projects, workshops and actions regarding the Alpine Convention, climate change, biodiversity or mobility. The «whatsalp» walking group crossed the Alps from Vienna in Austria to Nice in France last year, thus highlighting change in landscape and society. CIPRA participated with the «whatsalp-youth» project and organised events along the route.

How ideas grow and prosper



Social innovation: new ways of social interaction. © Johannes Gautier

Marko wants to move to the countryside, but he lacks courage and prospects. Susanne wonders what to do with the many empty buildings. In the project alpMonitor, CIPRA shows how social innovation is preparing the way for the future.

How must people in the Alps organise themselves in order to develop new ways of life and the local economy? What do people need to engage with innovative approaches, and how can such initiatives contribute to sustainable development within a community?

CIPRA International's new interactive presentation «Social innovation - How Ideas grow and prosper» takes users on the road to sustainable development. Different characters within this story show how new thinking can lead to solutions for old problems. Locals and guests meet challenges together and develop solutions for the fictitious remote region «Alp-valley»: How to revive fallow pastures, how to secure local supply, and how to value local traditions?

What favours social innovation

A web dossier deepens the questions and proposed solutions. The «Workshop Alps» provides an excellent breeding ground for social innovations. An inspiring environment, a diverse population and the experience that you have to continuously change in order to survive. It thrives where new ideas are valued, promoted and tested as a joint process.

alpmonitor.cipra.org (de, fr, it, sl)

Between the desire for relaxation and the pressure for development



A craft tradition as a tourist attraction: «pletnas» (traditional rowing boats) in Bled, Slovenia. © Občina Bled

Few topics provoke such heated debates as Alpine tourism. At the end of May 2018 CIPRA International and the «Alliance in the Alps» network of municipalities will be providing an opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions in Bled, Slovenia.

Tourism has brought relative prosperity to the Alps and remains an important source of income in many regions. At the same time tourism has brought challenges, such as excessive development or unlimited growth. Too many guests, a raucous fun-oriented scene and growing traffic at holiday weekends mean many destinations are seeing an increased scepticism towards tourism.

How can we rethink tourism as a holistic offer based on local resources while appreciating the natural and cultural heritage? How can guests, locals and temporary residents be involved in a common vision for a particular tourist destination? What strategies combine tourism, agriculture, crafts, education and culture? Which offers will benefit both guests and locals? What balance will enrich the entire region? Who will make this decision?

These questions will be addressed at the **Joint Annual Conference entitled «Alpine tourism: Quality of life included!»** to be held on 25 and 26 May 2018 in Bled, Slovenia. For more information and the programme see: www.cipra.org/de/jft2018 (de, fr, it, sl)

Caught between the season and home



Improving the situation of seasonal workers. © Chüestall Riederalp_flickr

The winter season in the Alps is at an end. The mostly foreign seasonal workers have worked hard for others' holidays. Initiatives in France and Switzerland are providing ideas on how to improve their situation.

Levelling ski slopes, changing bed linen, serving drinks, massaging shoulders – winter tourism in the Alps would not be possible without the numerous seasonal workers. A large part of the workforce comes from abroad. Long working hours, changing positions, frequently absent social networks and a foreign language make everyday life and integration into the local community more difficult. Projects in France and Switzerland now aim to help seasonal workers in the tourist industry.

The French town of Les Bellevilles now has a three-year plan that aims to reduce psychosocial risks to seasonal workers such as stress, overwork or even bullying. The concentrated working hours, challenges in the mountains such as cold and social isolation, as well as high workloads are all major burdens on their mental and physical health. Targeted information and networking services as well as to help, while workshops strengthen the awareness of employers of the existence of such risks in tourism.

preparation courses are intended

Many Portuguese work in the tourist resorts of Switzerland. According to Professor Beatrice Durrer Eggenschwiler of Lucerne's School of Social Work, the Portuguese are often barely integrated into local society and usually do not feel at home in the places where they live and work. Together with local authorities, institutions, employers and the Portuguese themselves, Lucerne University has – as part of the Interreg PlurAlps project – developed measures in four pilot communities (Engelberg, Lauterbrunnen, St. Moritz and Zermatt/Täsch) specifically to improve the situation of Portuguese workers. For Wolfgang Pfefferkorn, project manager for social innovation at CIPRA International, these initiatives represent important first steps: "The positive results from regions like this can inspire other municipalities in the Alps".

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The Brenner Pass: transit trouble



Record-high of trucks crossing the Brennerpass: How much transit traffic can the Alps tolerate? © MartinPutz_wikimedia commons

The year 2017 saw record numbers of trucks crossing the Brenner Pass. Now there is an opportunity to find a solution to the problem.

No fewer than 2.25 million articulated vehicles and trucks crossed the Brenner Pass between Austria and Italy in 2017: a record for the entire Alpine region of which no one is proud – except possibly the freight lobby, which has now threatened Austria with claims for damages due to delays caused by convoy controls. In Germany the planning for a rail access route to the future Brenner Base Tunnel has stalled, while the expansion of the A8 autobahn to six lanes all the way to the Austrian border is being discussed.

The Governor of Tyrol, Günther Platter, has been making strong statements of late. This situation cannot continue, he said at the beginning of April 2018 in agreement with the Austria-Tirol transit forum on the occasion of the "Future Day Tyrol" held in Innsbruck: "There must be a limit to the free of movement of goods where there is a risk to public health." Since 2018 the Austrian State of Tyrol has held the Presidency of Eusalp, the EU's macro-regional strategy for the Alpine region.

The Chairman of CIPRA Austria, Peter Hasslachner, takes such statements with a pinch of salt. He was pleased that the topic was addressed, but now believes that courageous steps are needed alongside painful measures. "But if not everyone pulls together along the entire route from Rosenheim to Verona, then there is no point." The problem is that the Eusalp Presidency changes annually – and thus so do its interests. "Only the

application of the Alpine Convention legally obliges the Alpine states and the EU to prioritise health over the free movement of goods.” The next step in this direction can be taken by the countries and regions at the transit summit to be held on 12 June in the Italian city of Bolzano.

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Departure time for helicopters



Heli-tourism: nature pays a high price for this trend. © Roderick Eime_flickr

At a time of declining winter tourism, heli-skiing brings in extra income. While sports enthusiasts might pay a few hundred euros, nature pays a high price.

Well-heeled winter sports fans can easily fly to the summit by helicopter; heli-biking is the latest trend; and taxi alternative Uber offered helicopter flights on demand for the Hahnenkamm race in Kitzbühel, Austria. Supply and demand for heli-tourism is increasing, although flying is the most energy-intensive form of mobility. «From an environmental point of view it is not just the high level of CO₂ emissions that is critical, but also the noise of helicopters negatively affecting whole valleys», explains Maren Kern, new head of mountain wilderness Switzerland. The country has 42 mountain landing sites: the Federal Administrative Court recently ruled that the establishment of the mountain landing sites, adopted in 2014, involved serious legal flaws. Now 20 of the landing sites located in national protected areas must be considered anew. In the view of mountain wilderness, «these helipads should be definitively abolished.»

Italy has a similarly lax regulatory approach to Switzerland. The generous rules also permit their French neighbours a backdoor: heli-skiing is prohibited in France but, in the Val d'Isère, helicopters fly on the Italian side of the valley. From there skiers can descend back into French territory. Germany and Austria too have prohibited heli-tourism, yet the Arlberg is an exception: flights to two mountains are permitted there during the week.

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Strange but true...



© Brian Scott_flickr

Using eagles to hunt remote-controlled drones – this is the extraordinary form of airspace monitoring currently being tested by police in the Swiss city of Geneva. Two eagle eggs were bought for the purpose and, once hatched, the chicks were placed in the care of a falconer; following training, the idea is that these birds of prey will bring down drones autonomously. Both the French army and the Dutch police have also been experimenting with such unorthodox methods, although the Dutch had to cancel their programme owing to the birds' unwillingness to obey commands. It is to be hoped that eagles will be allowed to carry on as before in their natural habitat – or will the Alps soon be seeing specially trained ibex butting from the saddle E-bikers who are too lazy to pedal?

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Agenda

THE 2018 UIAA MOUNTAIN PROTECTION AWARD, 18.04-31.05.2018, worldwide.
[More...](#)

PlurAlps Midterm Conference 2018, 16.-17.05.2018, Turin/I. [More...](#)

ForumAlpinum 2018 & 7th Water Conference, 04.-06.06.2018, Breitenweng/AT.
[More...](#)

Youth at the Top, 12.-13.07.2018, Alps & Carpathians. [More...](#)

EMS Annual Meeting: European Conference for Applied Meteorology and Climatology 2018, 03.-07.09.2018, Budapest/HU. [More...](#)