

“There's no other way”



Alenka Smerkolj from Slovenia succeeds Markus Reiterer from Austria as the new Secretary General of the Alpine Convention. © Alpine Convention

As a minister, 55-year-old Slovenian Alenka Smerkolj has already drawn up a strategy for Slovenia's sustainable development. As Secretary General of the Alpine Convention, she now intends to continue along this path.

Alenka Smerkolj replaced Markus Reiterer as Secretary General of the Alpine Convention on 15 July 2019. Her first engagements as the new Secretary General of the Alpine Convention will take her to the heads of the Alpine Convention offices in Bolzano in Italy and Innsbruck in Austria, after which talks will be held in all other Alpine countries. “I would like to personally get to know all the interest groups with which we are working”.

Politics instead of banking

Smerkolj gave up a long career in banking and financial management in 2014 to become Slovenia's Minister for Development and, for a short time, of Finance – a major change, as she herself says today. “Unlike in the banking business, I now had to make decisions for the benefit of everyone in society.” She also developed the “Vision of Slovenia 2050”, which hundreds of citizens took part in at events throughout Slovenia and can also be credited with Slovenia's 2017 national development strategy, based upon the United Nations' sustainability goals until 2030. According to Smerkolj, all this has made her a “passionate advocate of sustainable development”.

The biggest problem – the “silos mentality”

The Alps as a pioneering region for sustainable living in the heart of Europe – this vision of the future of the Alpine Convention is also supported by Alenka Smerkolj: “I find myself fully and utterly there again”. But one of the biggest problems in the Alpine region and worldwide is the silo mentality, as she sees it. Everyone sees solutions, but only for their own issues and challenges. But problems like climate change affect all sectors, from the economy to energy and transport. Here, networked, systemic thinking is needed. The 2015 sustainability goals of the United Nations would help, says the new Secretary General of the Alpine Convention. “There's no other way for our planet.”

The interview on the article can be listened to in full here as a podcast in English – Alenka Smerkolj talks about her role as the first female Secretary General of the Alpine Convention and reveals her personal favourite place in the Alps.

Further sources and information:

www.alpconv.org/en/home/news-publications/news/detail/alenka-smerkolj-takes-office-as-secretary-general-of-the-alpine-convention, www.sloveniatimes.com/govt-vision-for-slovenia-in-2050-presented, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alenka_Smerkolj

Point of view: So the landscape has a future



Špela Berlot, Managing Director of CIPRA Slovenia (c) Katarina Žakelj

The guardians of the landscape are the people who live there. They must be involved in the decision-making and development processes, says Špela Berlot, Managing Director of CIPRA Slovenia.

The Alpine landscape is a diverse mosaic. Sometimes idyllic, sometimes rugged, it reflects the past and present of the people who live there. But it is changing: agriculture, tourism, traffic routes, power generation – their infrastructures eat up and destroy the landscape. For the Alpine landscape to have a future, it needs protection, forward-looking planning and the involvement of local people.

The responsible authorities, the state and the municipalities are reacting too slowly, in an uncoordinated way and with a lack of ambition. There is no regular, open, integrative and solution-oriented dialogue between those who plan, develop and manage and those who live in the region. Binding agreements and a common understanding of protection, administration and development measures help to shape and manage the landscape responsibly. In the absence of cooperation between sectors and states, the sustainable use of the “resource” landscape is also at risk. A natural resource that is not renewable.

It is necessary to support good practices in dealing with landscape. Binding guidelines can help to encourage people to deal with the landscape in a sustainable and respectful manner. In the “Grounds for Landscape Policy” project, for example, an agreement has been formulated as the basis for rapid, coordinated, sustainable and ambitious decisions on how to deal with the landscape. In this way, approaches are created to link and coordinate the expectations, goals and actions of different areas and actors. Landscape thus contributes to making the development of a region a tangible experience as a joint process and an important element of personal and regional identity.

Starting signal for the Alpine Ticket



(c) CIPRA International

In summer, 100 young people are travelling sustainably through the Alps with the “Youth Alpine Interrail”. At the beginning of June they met for a kick-off in Feldkirch, Austria and forged travel plans together.

“I came across Yoalin by chance and found it super cool,” says 23-year-old Christina from Thun, Switzerland. She is one of the 100 young travellers who are travelling through the Alps on public transport with the “Youth Alpine Interrail” pass in July and August. At the kick-off event in Feldkirch, Austria at the beginning of June, the 34 participants had the opportunity to get to know each other and make plans together. The young adults talked about their favourite places in the Alps and discussed sustainable travel and mobility while speed dating. During a scavenger hunt, they explored Feldkirch, made wax cloths and waterproof bags in workshops

and listened to inputs on mobility and climate-friendly lifestyles.

While travelling, the young people are also asked to take part in sustainable “Yoalin Challenges”: living a week as a vegetarian or vegan, collecting garbage on a hike or asking about the myths and legends of a region. On social media channels such as Instagram and Facebook, they report on how they experience these

challenges. "I hope that the contact will continue while they travel. I'm looking forward to showing the other Yoalins my home," Christina says enthusiastically.

Source and further information: www.yoalin.org/kick-off

Alps Culture Workshop



Screeching saws, purring guitars, sizzling pans – that's the sound of culture in the Alps. The CIPRA Annual Symposium on 25 and 26 October in Altdorf, Switzerland will focus on the impact of culture and how it can contribute to sustainable development.

Hands shape clay, planes work wood, camera lenses capture moments, vocal chords form sounds: Alpine culture tells stories about usage, customs, materials, landscapes, traditions and their changes. Culture permeates our entire lives. It networks and condenses existing values and traditions, opens up space for new impulses, questions supposed realities and establishes new ones.

What significance does culture have for sustainable development in the Alpine region? CIPRA's annual conference from 25 to 26 October 2019 in Altdorf in the Swiss canton of Uri invites representatives from the fields of culture, politics, science, business and society to discuss the possibilities and limits of Alpine culture, to think creatively in workshops and to explore culture on site during excursions.

Programme, registration and further information: www.cipra.org/de/ift2019

Sectorial Development of Green Economy in the Alpine Region



(c) CIPRA International

The final document on the Green Economy Action Programme has been adopted by the alpine ministers at the XV. Alpine conference in Innsbruck on the 4th of April 2019. The Action Programme was elaborated by the consortium blue!, CIPRA International and Spatial Foresight.

The document is strongly based on the inputs gained in a series of stakeholder workshops organised in different Alpine countries between September and November 2017 and an online consultation. The programme contains 33 actions in the following categories:

- Greening finance and the financial support structures
- Encouraging eco-innovation
- Greening regional development
- Valorising ecosystems and biodiversity
- Living and working in a green economy

The 33 actions serve as a basis for future green economy projects.

In January 2019 the consortium blue!, CIPRA International and Spatial Foresight started a follow-up project entitled "GEAP - Sectoral". The main objective is to foster green economy activities and projects in specific sectors and a number of pilot regions in the Alps. The search for pilot regions is currently ongoing. The project will run until summer 2020.

Further informations:

www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/green-economy-in-the-alpine-region-start

Déjà-vu: Winter Olympic Games in Italy



Debt and scarcely used sports facilities: the legacy of "Torino 2006" in the Italian valleys of Susa and Chisone. © Francesco Pastorelli

Twenty years after the 2006 Games in Turin, the 2026 Winter Olympics return to the Italian Alps. The venues are jubilant and expectations are high. But a look at past games warns us to be cautious, because all too often they have merely left behind debts and ruined buildings.

After the Alpine cities of Sion, Graz and Innsbruck, as well as Sapporo in Japan and Calgary in Canada withdrew their candidacies, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded the 25th Winter Olympics to Milan and Cortina. The duo prevailed over Stockholm and Åre, whose bid was not really convincing and was only half-heartedly supported by the Swedish government. In Italy, the enthusiasm of politicians and media is boundless. But is the jubilation really justified? Or is there cause for concern?

According to the application, the Games are to be spread over several locations and many existing facilities used. The experience of Turin 2006, especially if you look at the total costs and the abandoned bobsleigh tracks, ski jumps and biathlon facilities in the mountain villages, should actually be a lesson for the organisers and politicians, says Francesco Pastorelli, Managing Director of CIPRA Italy. "A large city like Milan may be able to cope with such a major event and even profit from it. But this is not the case for the mountain areas affected – Valtellina and the Dolomites."

In the form in which they are conceived today by the IOC, these major events are not suitable for mountain regions, as CIPRA has always stressed in its "Olympic-free Alps" position. "There is not a single study that seriously shows that the Games have made a long-term and positive contribution to economic development in an Alpine region", Pastorelli emphasises. On the contrary, experience shows that the economic effects of the Olympic Games are short-lived, if indeed there are any at all.

Shortly after the Milan and Cortina bid was accepted, the shares of real estate and construction companies rose on the Milan Stock Exchange. The concern that the Games will be used as a pretext to build new ski resort connections and transport infrastructures is therefore more than justified.

Sources and further information:

[twnews.it/it-news/risanamento-vola-in-borsa-effetto-olimpiadi-invernali](https://www.twnews.it/it-news/risanamento-vola-in-borsa-effetto-olimpiadi-invernali) (it), www.ilfoglio.it/economia/2019/06/25/news/effetto-olimpiadi-a-piazza-affari-262247/ (it), www.milanocortina2026.coni.it/images/CandidatureFile_MilanoCortina2026_eng.pdf (it), <https://corrierealpi.gelocal.it/belluno/cronaca/2019/06/25/news/gli-ambientalisti-contro-le-olimpiadi-a-cortina-1.35692565> (it), www.cipra.org/it/dossiers/giochi-olimpici-invernali/rapporti-sulla-base-delle-esperienze-1/giochi-olimpici-di-torino-2006 (it), www.cipra.org/it/posizioni/alpi-libere-da-olimpiadi (it)

Holidaying with a clear conscience



The mountaineering village of Ramsau/D is a good example of sustainable tourism. (c) Fritz Rasp

From Germany's first mountaineering village, to the Italian "Albergo Diffuso", to coworking space in a Swiss holiday region: three inspiring examples that show how environmentally friendly and socially responsible holidays in the Alps can be.

"We are Olympic champions in unsuccessful Olympic applications," says Ramsau Tourism Director Fritz Rasp, laughing. After several unsuccessful Olympic bids with different partners, he decided not to pursue any more major sporting events. In 2015, the German village of Ramsau received the *Bergsteigerdorf* seal of approval. "This is not just a tourist label for us. We want to align our community policy with the mountaineering village philosophy". The people of Ramsau reintroduced old livestock breeds such as the Alpine Stone Sheep and the Black Alpine Pig, while one hotel obtains all its lamb meat from local farmers, and events such as Jens Badura's "Alpine Philosophicum" invite critical reflection.

Scattered rooms, satisfied guests

Near the historic Italian town of Tolmezzo there is a stable. Only a few years ago its plaster was fragile and the roof was crooked. For decades no one had a use for it. Today people from all over the world come and go here. In a tasteful combination of old buildings and modern architecture, the stable has been renovated and converted into a holiday home. Hotel manager Daniela takes care of the former stable for the "Albergo diffuso Tolmezzo" and 13 other buildings in the area that are rented as accommodation: "We are not a normal hotel, where all rooms and services are concentrated in one house: instead we are scattered all over Tolmezzo". Staying here lets you get to know not only Tolmezzo, but also its people and traditions.

Coworking enlivens the mid-season

The Lower Engadine in Switzerland also shows how an Alpine valley can develop new strategies for sustainable tourism. In Alpine mountain coworking spaces such as the village of Ftan or the planned InnHub meeting centre in the village of LaPunt, to be opened in 2022, guests can forge ideas together. Visitors are also increasingly using the rooms in the autumn months, when the Lower Engadine otherwise sees fewer tourists. At the beginning of the project there would have been many sceptics, but this has changed considerably in the meantime. "Now I feel great support from local people", says Jon Erni, founder of the initiative "MiaEngiadina".

The stories of these three examples of sustainable tourism can now be read in full here:

- [Mountaineering village instead of Olympic village](#)
 - [Scattered rooms, satisfied guests](#)
 - [From coworking to the climate educational trail](#)
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Making politics with fire



At the Trift glacier, on 10 August active Alpine enthusiasts ignite a fire in solidarity as a symbol for the preservation of the Alps and the protection of water bodies. (c) Dominik Siegrist

From the Trift Glacier in Switzerland to the Vrsič Pass in Slovenia, around 30 "Fires in the Alps" will burn across the Alpine peaks on 10 August 2019. People from all Alpine countries are thus setting a common sign for living waters and the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Alps.

In the high mountains, where ice once formed the glaciers, global warming is leaving more and more rock and debris behind. Power plant, road and ski area projects are putting the sensitive natural areas of the Alps under additional pressure. On the second weekend in August, therefore, around 1,000 people have since 1988 met annually in various Alpine regions in order to ignite mountain fires as a show of solidarity.

For living waters

The landscape around the Trift Glacier, in the central Swiss Alps in the far east of the Canton of Bern, remains untouched but the glacier is melting away due to climate change. The Oberhasli power stations (KWO) are planning a reservoir there, but 95 percent of Switzerland's hydropower potential has already been exploited. "Honest climate policy means not building new reservoirs but considering where there is potential for renewable energies," explains Dominik Siegrist, an experienced mountain hiker, co-founder of the Trift Committee and former president of CIPRA International. On 10 August 2019, around 40 alpine dairywomen and men will gather at the foot of the Trift Glacier in Switzerland to light a fire together "for living waters".

"Pass it on" – mountain passes and their stories

Above the Slovenian municipality of Kranjska Gora, a road winds its way up to Vrsič, the highest road pass in the Julian Alps at 1,611 metres. The increasing car and motorcycle traffic over the pass and through the surrounding area clouds the idyll. From 8 to 10 August, CIPRA Slovenia will be organising discussion rounds, hikes, youth workshops and a participatory exhibition on the natural and cultural heritage of the area around the Vrsič Pass. On 10 August 2019 they will also light a fire at the top of the pass.

Elsewhere in the Alps, too, fires will be lit on the second weekend in August – for issues such as ecological transport concepts instead of road construction, for nature and climate protection and also for nature-oriented tourism. A list of all fires can be found at: www.feuerindenalpen.com

More information:

www.feuerindenalpen.com/ (de), <https://triftkomitee.ch> (de), www.grimselverein.ch/zuhause.html (de), www.cipra.org/de/veranstaltungen/buchvernissage-alpenwanderer (de)

Rethinking spaces



Teren uses a temporarily empty area as a social experimental space. © Jana Jocif

A picnic at a construction site, the rescue of undeveloped land and the conversion of an old barracks: three examples that rethink spatial planning in the Alps.

Anyone crossing from the train station in Ljubljana in Slovenia to the other side of the road will stumble across "Teren". Young people perform gymnastics on horizontal bars, children play hide and seek, a gumbo stew steams on the homemade clay cooker, some people scamper over pallet furniture, others are making briquettes out of sawdust at a workshop.

From workshops to ordinary picnics, everyone can use the space free of charge. "Teren is a place of experimentation that is open to everyone," explains architect Nina Savič. She is a member of the *prostoRož* cultural association that has turned this disused construction site into a meeting place.

Urban life in the Vinschgau region

In the middle of the Italian municipality of Schlanders stands the Drusus barracks, once a military outpost, which the BASIS Vinschgau Venosta project is now converting as a venue for new forms of events. "I live an urban lifestyle in the country," says project initiator Hannes Götsch. He and his team hope that the barracks will become a space for business, education, culture and social affairs, a meeting place for the creative scene.

Buying free space

"We want to use crowdfunding to keep strategically important areas permanently free and accessible by purchasing them or acquiring rights to them," says Martin Strele, chairman of the *Bodenfreiheit* association in the Austrian federal state of Vorarlberg. The association has successfully bought its first plots of land and acquired walking rights, public pressure has prevented planned expansions of settlements. In addition the approach to land and soil in Vorarlberg has become an important topic.

[Picnic at the construction site](#)

[Urban life in the countryside](#)

[Keeping free spaces free](#)

Oh...



Emergency solution in Tyrol/A: traffic jam escapees have to return to the motorway. (c) Renardo la vulpo_wikimedia

And every day the Brenner says hello. The very clever – and those with smart navigation devices – simply avoid the annual holiday jam towards Bella Italia. They leave the Brenner motorway and turn onto the main road through the villages of the beautiful Wipptal Valley in Austria. But they have reckoned without the Tyroleans: recently the police have welcomed the traffic jam escapees right after the exit – and sent them back onto the motorway. Traffic jams, stress and tolls: the Tyrolean traffic police don't like their German and Italian neighbours at all. Their neighbours in Salzburg in Austria, on the other hand, like the idea and also want to block "certain" roads during the holiday season. That would be THE chance for the railways! We already have a slogan ready: "Faster traffic through the Alps – jam-free on the highest railway of all!"

Agenda

Fire in the Alps, 10.-11.8.2019, Alpswide. [More...](#)

35th International Conference in Alpine Meteorology in Riva del Garda, 02.-06.09.2019, Riva del Garda/I. [More...](#)

International Mountain Conference, 08.-12.09.2019, Innsbruck/A. [More...](#)

ALPBIONET2030 final conference, 08.-09.10.2019, Chamonix/F. [More...](#)

CIPRA Annual Forum from 25 to 26 October in Altdorf/CH, 25.-26.10.2019, Altdorf/CH. [More...](#)