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"Focus on the Alps": The Fourth CIPRA Summer Academy Course in Liechtenstein, 13–31 August 2001

"Focus on the Alps," the annual Summer Academy course organized by the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA: Commission internationale pour la protection des Alpes) took place for the fourth time since 1998 in Schaan, Liechtenstein, from 13 to 31 August 2001.

CIPRA is an umbrella organization representing more than 100 nongovernmental organizations and associations concerned with the Alpine region. CIPRA also collaborates closely with political institutions in the Alpine countries. CIPRA's main aim is to support activities and formulate guidelines for sustainable and environmentally sound development of the Alpine region. Since 1952, CIPRA has been focusing on the implementation of the measures now officially contained in the Alpine Convention.

This Convention consists of 9 individual protocols that deal with specific, cross-sectoral alpine issues. Since ratification by its signatories (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland, Monaco, and the European Union), the Convention has become binding under international law. CIPRA is helping to implement the Alpine Convention.

Promoting integrated knowledge of transnational issues

As a concrete application of the Alpine Convention, CIPRA established an annual Summer Academy in 1998. This year, 13 participants attended the fourth seminar of this Academy. Their aim was to broaden their practical or academic knowledge of the Alps and to learn more about specific alpine issues. For 3 weeks, participants dealt with a variety of topics ranging from alpine geography to alpine resources, environmental planning, stakeholders in the Alpine region, mountain agriculture and forestry, tourism, mountain forests, human–wildlife interactions, energy, traffic problems, and the Alpine Convention. The main goal of the course was to develop an integrated and interdisciplinary understanding of transnational problems

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and to present the different countries' views of the Alps.

Generally speaking, the course offers detailed and specific information that can hardly be obtained in standard educational institutions. CIPRA invites professional lecturers who are either academics or experts with a background as practitioners. Daily evaluations of the lectures enable the participants to influence the program and ask that changes be made in order to accommodate special interests. This feedback instrument also makes it possible to improve the schedule and choice of topics in future courses offered by the Summer Academy. An important aim of the course is to link theoretical information with practical case studies. This involves teamwork activities as well as excursions to destinations illustrating specific aspects of the course.

Promoting lasting cooperation and networking

This year's participants came from 5 Alpine countries: Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and France. Many interesting and stimulating discussions arose, especially given the wide range of participants' educational backgrounds, for example, in geography, biology and nature conservation, landscape planning, tourism, forestry, and political science. As a result of living and working together for the duration of the course, participants developed friendships and plans for future professional cooperation.

In addition to the 3-week Summer Academy course, the participants were able to attend a 2-day seminar entitled "Planned Landscape: Methods of Landscape Planning in the Alpine Countries." This seminar was also open to additional experts and the general public. It provided an opportunity to learn more about the situation of landscape planning with legal frameworks for all Alpine countries. Theoretical issues were discussed in teams, thus enabling analysis and comparison of the Alpine countries. The teamwork activities culminated in stimulating discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of landscape planning in the respective countries. Participants thus gained detailed knowledge on the issues at stake and developed an understanding of the impact of landscape planning instruments and their potential to promote the aim of sustainable use of alpine resources. Events such as this one have the great advantage of facilitating cooperation between experts across national borders as well as collaboration between participating NGOs and governmental and other public institutions. Moreover, important networking activities among these stakeholders are further cultivated.

Personal networks are thus one of the most important long-term benefits of the Summer Academy. They develop between the course participants and enable them to get in touch with major institutional and academic players in the Alpine region. An annual meeting with former graduates promotes exchange of experiences related to shared alpine interests. The sense of working in and for the Alps as a region in its own right is another important impact of the Summer Academy: the Alps are perceived as a distinct area, independent of state boundaries. CIPRA's Summer Academy is therefore a valuable institutional contribution to regional self-awareness; its existence contributes to further development of a mountain area worth living in.

Information on CIPRA, its Summer Academy, and many other useful alpine topics is available at www.cipra.org.

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