

Alpine Resources: Assets for a Promising Future— Conclusions from the ForumAlpinum 2014

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Alpine Resources: Assets for a Promising Future—Conclusions from the ForumAlpinum 2014

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Alpine resources will play a crucial role in the development of the European Alpine region: They are triggering genuine innovations in technology, social and cultural institutions, property ownership, and economic valuation. Natural, social, cultural, and economic resources are crucial assets for sustainable development in Alpine regions. This was reason enough for the International Scientific Committee for Alpine Research (ISCAR), an organization in which the Interacademic Commission for Alpine Studies (ICAS) represents the Swiss Academies, to make Alpine resources the main topic of the 2014 ForumAlpinum. ICAS invited ISCAR to report on the outcomes of the Forum.

A common effort

The 2014 ForumAlpinum was jointly organized by the International Scientific Committee for Alpine Research (ISCAR) and the Mountain University Edolo (a decentralized campus of the University of Milan, Italy) and supported by the Italian Council of Ministries and the Lombardy regional government. The ForumAlpinum offered broad insight into ongoing and planned European Alpine research, concepts, and actions, focusing on the use, valorization, and management of Alpine resources. The main results of the ForumAlpinum 2014 can be summarized in 3 statements:

1. Alpine resources create assets relevant to (sustainable) regional development.
2. Additional efforts are needed to ensure sustainable use of Alpine resources.
3. Mountain-related resource policies are needed.

Alpine resources create assets relevant to (sustainable) regional development

The importance of Alpine resources such as minerals, timber, and water has changed over the last few centuries, in line with economic and technological development. The last few decades in particular have witnessed rapid changes in the relative importance of these resources. Today, as numerous talks at the ForumAlpinum 2014 demonstrated, the cultural and intangible resources in the Alpine region have great potential for socioeconomic development. The large number of natural and/or cultural UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Alps is evidence of the growing importance of intangible values for socioeconomic development. In general, the tourist sector will profit most from the valorization of cultural resources, and especially from the promotion of local identity and authenticity.

Of the classical Alpine resources, energy based on renewable sources such as water, biomass, sun, wind, and geothermal resources is a topic of growing importance. However, it is important to remember that another classical resource, the Alpine landscape itself, is very sensitive to socioeconomic development. A third classical resource, Alpine farming, forms the economic, social, and cultural backbone of many mountain communities, especially where summer pasturing of cattle takes place.

The Alpine area is characterized by multifunctional use of resources to achieve multiple benefits; agro-tourism is a typical example. At the ForumAlpinum, many multiuse initiatives were presented, including projects that link agriculture, food, traditional crops, biodiversity, and

cultural heritage as well as projects that integrate landscape, health, and tourism. Various concepts and approaches were discussed with regard to how resource uses can be combined—for example, by creating regional value chains, combining agriculture and forestry (“multifunctional land use”), and considering ecosystem services as a part of resource use and pricing. Such integrated approaches are needed to develop a coherent regional economic policy while safeguarding Alpine landscapes.

Additional efforts are needed to ensure sustainable use of Alpine resources

Most of the contributions to the ForumAlpinum addressed the efforts needed to ensure sustainable and continuous resource use in the future. The first challenge is to find new applications for cultural and traditional practices and local knowledge. Second, legal and economic efforts have to be strengthened to ensure that local people and the local economy benefit from the use of resources. Third, research and education have to provide younger generations with the skills and knowledge to use Alpine resources in a way that enables sustainable livelihoods. This last point seems to be the most promising with regard to the creation of future innovation and entrepreneurship within or related to the Alps.

Mountain-related resource policies are needed

Different policy approaches were discussed during the ForumAlpinum, with the main objective of creating benefits from the use of Alpine resources for the regional economy. To achieve this, models of multilevel governance have to be adapted to

mountain regions. Mountain-specific resource policies will need an overarching framework for regulation and cooperation. With regard to cooperation, the Alpine region can benefit from existing entities such as the Alpine Convention, the European Macro-Regional Strategy for the Alpine Space, and regional communities such as the Consortium of Alpine Regions. However, a couple of bottom-up initiatives discussed at the ForumAlpinum showed that strategy development, participatory planning, shared experiences, and policy dialogues can also contribute to a transalpine resource policy.

Conclusion

The ForumAlpinum 2014 emphasized that the Alps are rich in natural and cultural resources that are important

for all people, whether they live in the mountains or not, and that their use is shaped by complex interactions between valuation and management practices, property rights, and governance. Alpine regions need to adopt innovative social and technological tools to ensure sustainable use of resources. The Interacademic Commission for Alpine Studies and ISCAR will promote research to develop such innovations.

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LINKS

ForumAlpinum 2014, <http://www.forumalpinum.org/en/>

ISCAR, <http://www.iscar-alpineresearch.org>
Università degli Studi di Milano,
<http://www.unimontagna.it>

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