

“Future in the Alps”: getting knowledge across – networking people

Wolfgang Pfefferkorn & Serena Rauzi

Abstract

CIPRA's Future in the Alps Project aims at showcasing examples of successful implementation and successful projects in the Alps, and making available to others the extensive pool of experience and practical knowledge that lies in these projects. But how to transfer knowledge in an area of some 14 million inhabitants with several linguistic and cultural regions in which thousands of projects are carried out each year, so that various players working and living in completely different contexts are able to learn and benefit from each other?

Keywords: Alps, CIPRA, good practice examples, knowledge transfer, regional development

1 We don't need to keep re-inventing the wheel!

Scene 1: the Valle Varaita in southern Piedmont, close to the border with France. A group of young local residents is trying to win the mayor and local councillors over to the idea of setting up a new multifunctional community centre. They want the kindergarten, which was closed down three years ago, to be re-opened there. A grocery store and the cultural association are also to be given a new home at the centre. But what's the best way of going about this project? Perhaps the neighbouring communities experiencing a similar situation could be won over and agree to co-operate? How can national and EU funding be raised?

Scene 2: the southern Allgäu Alps. Several communities have been planning to set up a biosphere park for some time. So far the population has been rather sceptical. In what way would a biosphere park benefit the locals? It would simply increase the burden of traffic from visitors! Would such a park create new jobs? Are there any examples of successful biosphere parks? How did those in charge go about it? How were the locals involved?

Scene 3: Kobarid, in Slovenia's Soča (Isonzo) Valley – a densely wooded area where forestry plays a significant role. At present the timber is exported abroad, where it is processed into high-quality products. Why not organising the timber processing on site? It would create qualified jobs, and lead to new businesses and new industries. Local inhabitants would no longer have to commute elsewhere to work, and young people would remain in the area. The people working for the local promotion agency have been wondering for some time whether other communities have had similar experiences and good results. Whom can they address to to find out which procedures are the most likely to lead to success?

2 The knowledge is already there – but where?

These three examples all have one thing in common: people who are keen to get things moving despite difficult conditions. Their ideas are not new. What they have in mind has already been tried elsewhere, albeit under different conditions. Some of the projects and initiatives, in fact many of them, failed or never even managed to get off the ground; but there are those which did, and some of them even became a big success. For example the biosphere reserve in Entlebuch in Switzerland; the regional value added chain in Bregenzerwald, Vorarlberg; the Polo Poschiavo competence centre in Grisons; the landscape park in Slovenia's Logar Valley; or the concept of "green tourism" in Salzburg's Werfenweng municipality.

And this is precisely what CIPRA's Future in the Alps Project is all about: showcasing examples of successful implementation and successful projects in the Alps, and making available to others the extensive pool of experience and practical knowledge that lies in these projects. In other words: extracting the stores of knowledge that lie within the Alps, and making them available to those in search.

3 Project background

The project „Future in the Alps“ focusing on knowledge transfer was developed in a pre-project between 2003 and 2004. A number of Alpine experts were invited to discuss the core topics of a project, which should focus on the main future challenges of the Alps. In two workshops, the experts pointed out several thematic fields that should be in the centre of the project: added regional value, governance capacity, the role of large protected areas, mobility, new forms of decision making, and policy implementation. In addition, the experts made clear, that the project should not deal with new research but focus on existing knowledge.

In general, collecting and disseminating knowledge should contribute to a sustainable development of the Alps. Specifically, it should support innovative initiatives and bring together actors, institutions and networks from different sectors and levels and thereby create results and outputs relevant beyond the project end.

Based on these key requirements, the project team started to design a project taking into the consideration the basics of regional knowledge transfer. The project was financed by the MAVA Foundation for Nature Conservation, Montricher/CH. The project duration was July 2004 until December 2007.

4 Topics of “Future in the Alps”

The project addresses six topics:

1. Added Regional Value: How can endogenous resources be more effectively used to set up value-added chains?
2. Governance Capacity: How can the governance capacity of individuals and communities be strengthened?

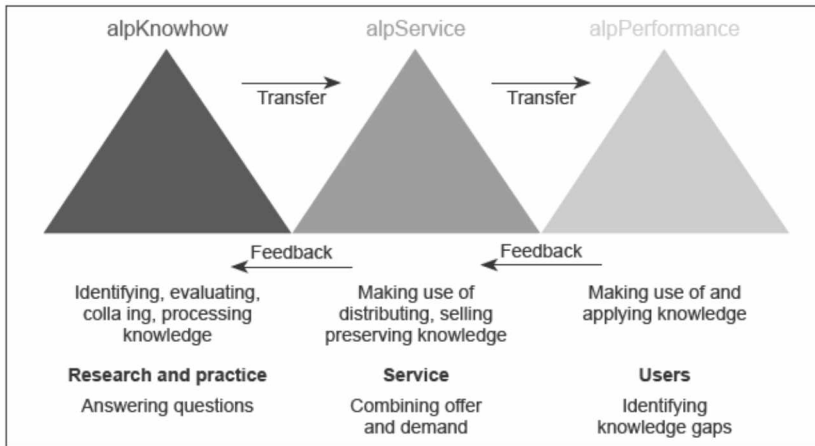


Figure 1: The three parts of Future in the Alps Source: CIPRA.

3. Protected Areas: How can large-scale protected areas contribute to preserving biodiversity and the added regional value?
4. Mobility: What solutions are there in terms of mobility for tourism, leisure and community mobility in the Alpine region?
5. New Forms of Decision Making: How can new forms of decision making contribute towards achieving better results when it comes to negotiating the demands of regional development along the lines of sustainable development?
6. Policies and Instruments: How can policies and instruments be adapted to contribute more effectively to the objectives of sustainable development?

5 The three parts of the project

Future in the Alps consists of three parts (cf. figure 1):

- alpKnowhow, to gather the wealth of knowledge
- alpService, to mediate the knowledge, and
- alpPerformance, to apply the knowledge gained.

6 Knowledge transfer in “Future in the Alps”

In spring 2005, a small team, whose members covered a broad spectrum both technically and geographically, was commissioned for each of the six topics to collate the current level of scientific knowledge and the practical experience gained from a multitude of projects implemented in the Alps. The work of the six “topic teams” was completed at the end of March 2006.

The results are available in the online database (<http://www.cipra.org/en/future-in-the-alps/>): six work reports in English, some 80 pages in scope, 240 excerpts

from scientific works, 160 examples of best practice from throughout the Alpine region, and 570 projects submitted as part of a competition held across the Alps.

7 The tasks of alpService

The alpService tasks included the following:

- Analysing the needs of the regional actors and target groups
- Supporting the constitution of networks and platforms
- Organising an Alpine wide competition of good practice projects
- Installing and running an online database
- Developing and offering transfer services:
 - Running conferences and workshops
 - Working out teaching and starting co-operation with educational institutions
 - Initiating global knowledge transfer
 - Publishing the 3rd Alpine Report
- Initiating follow up projects
- Preserving the knowledge gained, ensuring continuity

7.1 Analysing the needs of the regional actors and target groups

In the very beginning of “Future in the Alps”, the project team carried out a stakeholder analysis. Then launching workshops were conducted with these stakeholders in all Alpine countries to inform about the project and to identify regional expectations and needs. This helped to specify the project contents and to ensure that the outcomes and results would be of best possible use for the regional actors.

7.2 Supporting the constitution of networks and platforms

Networking, i.e. bringing people together and offering a framework for the exchange of knowledge and experience, was one of the key elements of “Future in the Alps”. Therefore the project team contacted a wide range of actors all over the Alps and informed them about the project. As a result, the members of the project team were invited to more than 35 conferences, workshops, and exhibitions at different locations in and outside the Alps to present the project and its results. With these networking activities the project team could reach more than 4,000 persons.

The contacts were used to deepen the relations between CIPRA and stakeholders from other sectors and fields (architects, experts in natural hazard management, forest experts, tourism boards, regional managers, knowledge management experts, environmental groups, etc.).

7.3 Organising an Alpine wide competition of good practice projects

The Alpine wide competition of good practice projects carried out in summer 2005 was a big success. The 572 submitted projects had a detailed description of aims,

contents, results, success factors, problems and how they were overcome, transferability aspects, etc. All these projects have been online since July 2005 and offer a rich source for successful implementation of regional projects in the Alps.

In summer 2005 a jury selected 6 projects as price winners. The prize money was 25,000 Euro for each of the 6 projects. In addition, the jury awarded additional smaller prizes to 2 more projects.

Assuming that each of the 572 projects was prepared by at least 2 persons, the competition mobilised a wide variety of regional actors who were included into the project database as target group for further transfer activities.

The competition also supported the expert teams working in alpKnowhow. These teams evaluated the 572 projects and selected some of them as “Alpine wide best practice”.

7.4 Installing and running an online database

Parallel to the research work in alpKnowhow and the preparation of transfer activities in alpService, the project team had to provide the technical requirements for the online database to establish the database. This was done with the support of information technology experts. The project team decided to build up the database on the open source “plone”-technology. One of the key challenges was to deal with the different languages. Actually, the database can be used in German, French, Italian, Slovenian and English, although not all contents are available in all languages.

After establishing the database and filling in all contents coming from alpKnowhow and the competition, the database was integrated into the existing CIPRA websites and databases. In a third step, the database was linked bilaterally with a number of other databases, which focus on similar issues and good practice projects.

7.5 Developing and offering transfer services

After the research work of the expert teams in alpKnowhow was completed, the competition was held and the online database was established, the project team was ready to start the transfer activities. The focus was on three transfer channels:

1. Web based transfer: online database, electronic newsletter, mailings;
2. Hard copy print products: articles in daily newspapers, articles in journals, books; and
3. Direct physical exchange: workshops, conferences, excursions.

7.5.1 Running conferences and workshops

Together with the national CIPRA organisations, „Future in the Alps“ carried out the following conferences: “Urban Alps-Rural Alps” (22–24 September 2005, Brig, Switzerland), “Climate-Change-Alps” (18–20 May 2006, Bad Hindelang, Germany), and “The Alps beyond Kyoto” (25–27 October 2007, Aosta Valley, Italy). As a final event, “Future in the Alps” contributes to the Alpweek 2008, where “Sustainable innovation” will be one of the key topics. The Alpweek is held in France from 11–14 June 2008.

Besides these conferences, the project team has set up a workshop-series with 12 trans-national workshops. These workshops were dedicated to the different key topics of „Future in the Alps“ and designed according to a workshop concept, which had been elaborated by the project team before. The workshop concept included the following principles:

- Local co-operation: In order to support further networking, each workshop was organised in co-operation with a local partner. Local partners were: regional governments, the LEADER network, regional management agencies, educational institutions, INTERREG projects, etc.
- Cross border aspect: Most of the workshops were held in border regions to bring together actors from different countries with different backgrounds and experiences.
- National languages: As the English language is still a barrier for direct exchange of experiences between stakeholders from Alpine countries, the project team decided to run the workshops in national languages and to provide simultaneous translation.
- Three key elements of the Agenda: Each workshop was divided into three sections. An initial plenary with presentations, a field trip or local excursion to a best practice example and small working groups to deepen the discussion and exchange.
- Social aspects: One of the key elements of these workshops was to create a warm and open atmosphere for all participants, to create a perfect framework for social contacts and an exchange between participants.
- Synergies with other transfer activities: The workshops were used to promote the other transfer channels of “Future in the Alps”: the online database, the 6 thematic reports, the 3rd Alpine report, etc.
- Feedback and evaluation: the participants of the workshops were asked to fill in a questionnaire and to provide feedback to the organisers.
- Documentation of results: All the material presented at these workshops (ppt-files, abstracts, etc.) was collected and uploaded on the project website. They are available in the online project database.

Feedback from the workshop participants:

About 750 people participated in the 12 workshops. This is an average of more than 60 participants per workshop. About 170 participants gave feedback to the project team via a questionnaire. The feedback can be summarised as follows:

- Knowledge transfer and exchange of experience are estimated as crucial task not only at present but also for the future.
- The workshop participants see CIPRA as an important player in the Alps. They expect from CIPRA continuous networking activities, knowledge transfer and exchange of experience, support in the organisation of conferences and workshops, internet offers such as discussion fora and help-lines.
- The workshops are estimated as a very successful knowledge transfer tool: They link theory and practice, support networking and sharing of experiences, offer access to best practice projects and new knowledge. Being also a bourse for new

(project) ideas, the workshops are considered as a real window of opportunity by the participants.

- It turned out that problems in different thematic fields are often similar in different regions. This means that participants can share their analyses and learn from each other.
- Excursions to best practice examples are a crucial experience for learning and understanding.
- Many participants highlighted the need of methodological learning. This is mostly required in the field of public participation and conflict management.
- The participants also pointed out, that the small working groups in the third phase of the workshops were very helpful for direct exchange and getting to know the other participants and their background in detail.

All in all, this feedback of the participants was very positive and encouraging for the project time. It seems that “the right things have been done” and “that the things have been done right”.

7.5.2 Working out teaching and starting co-operation with educational institutions

„Future in the Alps“ aims at preserving the knowledge gained and ensuring that this knowledge will be used beyond the project end. Therefore the project team decided to summarise the main results and experiences and to create teaching and learning materials for educational institutions all over the Alps. This teaching and learning material is divided into 8 tutorials. It is available on cd-rom and will be put online in the second half of the year 2008.

In addition, the project team established contacts to educational institutions all over the Alps to find out, in which way future trans-national teaching programmes could be designed. The result was a short feasibility study about a “MAS – Excellence in Alpine Development”: It turned out, that developing such a trans-national Master Curriculum would be too much demanding in the frame of the “Future in the Alps” project, therefore, the project team concentrated on the teaching and learning material. The idea of creating a trans-national education programme for Alpine development issues is still alive and will be continued under another framework.

7.5.3 Initiating global knowledge transfer

As the global transfer resources were limited in the project, the team concentrated on three activities:

- A transfer workshop for key actors from Eastern European countries (Budapest, 22–23 January 2007);
- A transfer workshop for key actors of the Carpathians (Kosiv, Ivano-Frankivsk region, Ukraine, 31 May–2 June 2007);
- A knowledge transfer co-operation with InWent, a German development organisation. In this transfer co-operation, 25 key actors from the Himalaya region (Pakistan, China, Nepal and Tadjikistan), took part in a one year change management training in Germany. “Future in the Alps” contributes with 2 two-week

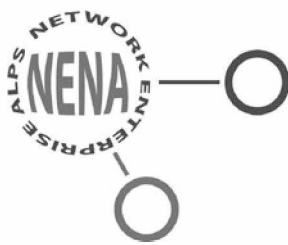
training modules in autumn 2007 and spring 2008. In addition, many actors of the CIPRA and “Future in the Alps” network offered the participants two practical training units in their institutions (6 weeks each).

7.5.4 Publishing the 3rd Alpine Report

Under the framework of „Future in the Alps“, CIPRA published the 3rd Alpine report. This report is one of the key products of the project. The book is divided into three parts: the first part presents selected best practice projects and the persons behind, the second part gives background information related to the 6 key topics of the project, and the third part is a collection of recent data and development trends in the last 20 years. The 3rd Alpine Report has been published in German, Italian, French and Slovenian. An English version may be published in 2008.

7.6 Follow up projects

7.6.1 NENA-Network Enterprise Alps



NENA is a project financed under the INTERREG-Alpine Space programme. The NENA project was initiated by the project team of “Future in the Alps”. NENA intends to promote the better use of endogenous resources, sustainable production and innovation along the production and distribution chain in the field of wood production and renewable energy. Whereas cooperation platforms at regional, possibly national level exist, enterprises and their umbrella organisations only seldom cooperate with their counterparts across the boundaries. This is the chance that the NENA Network intends to offer its members: to raise competitiveness whilst orienting their activities towards more ecological and social sustainability. Therefore, NENA is a learning network. As for other Alpine wide networks, the Alpine Convention is a framework for the network aims and activities.

NENA is not only an INTERREG project, it is also a network which has been officially established in January 2008. The network members are sustainability and innovation oriented umbrella organisations and enterprises. They have following aims:

- to exchange experiences and to share knowledge as well as to carry out long term co-operation on specific topics and projects within the Alps;
- to act result, output and benefit oriented;
- to help Alpine enterprises to raise their innovation potential and their competitiveness;
- to join in PR and marketing activities to increase the demand/market for products of the network enterprises;
- to increase the contribution of Alpine enterprises and their umbrella organisations to sustainable development in the Alps; and
- to continually expand its memberships.

NENA will continue beyond “Future in the Alps”. The network will be financed on the one hand by its members and on the other hand through an INTERREG follow up project. For more information: <http://www.nena-network.net/>

7.6.2 DYNALP²



With DYNALP² the Alliance in the Alps community network is pursuing the work on sustainable development and implementation of the Alpine Convention initiated by the DYNALP Project. DYNALP² implements the findings from CIPRA's “Future in the Alps” Project at the community level and promotes exchanges between the municipalities.

The DYNALP² Project is scheduled to run for a term of just over three years, from April 2006 to June 2009. The Project has a total funding volume of € 1,775,000. The MAVA Foundation for Nature Conservation/CH is assuming € 1,275,000 of that amount, Alpine municipalities provide € 500,000 co-financing.

The focus of DYNALP² is on projects in communities, which make a real contribution towards implementing sustainable development and the Alpine Convention. Projects of the amount of € 20,000 to € 40,000 are sponsored by up to 50%. DYNALP² projects focus on one or more of the following topic areas: Added Regional Value, Governance Capacity, Protected Areas, Mobility, New Forms of Decision Making, and Policies and Instruments. Until now 36 projects with a total volume of € 500,000 were approved.

Besides the implementation projects, thematic workshops are to be expanded under DYNALP² as experience has shown that the benefits for communities are very high. After brief introductions to the theoretical aspects, representatives of Alpine communities obtain practical experience from other communities and are able to witness initial results on field trips. Discussions provide a means of sounding out the transferability to their own community of what they see and hear. DYNALP² provides thematic field trips usually scheduled to tie in with the workshops in terms of both content and timing. For more information: <http://www.alpenallianz.org/en/projects/dynalp2>

7.6.3 Initiating and accompanying pilot projects

The six winners of the “Future in the Alps” competition had to define, for which activities they would use the prize money. These activities were defined as pilot projects and carried out by the prize winners themselves. Examples: the extension of public private partnerships to enlarge the Logarska Dolina Landscape Park in Slovenia, a film about the citizen's initiative in Val Pusteria (Italy), the publishing of a book about sustainable mobility in the tourist municipality of Werfenweng, etc. The “Future in the Alps” project team monitored the progress to ensure that the expected results were achieved.

7.7 Preserving the knowledge gained, ensuring continuity

The idea of “Future in the Alps” was to identify and to circulate useful knowledge in the Alps. This idea and the activities related do not stop at the end of a project. Therefore it was the intention of the project team to create structures and to set up activities which have the chance to survive after the closure of the project. Some of these are: the follow up projects NENA and DYNALP², the regional pilot projects, the online database, the networking activities, etc. In addition CIPRA intends to continue the most promising activities in a follow up project, which should start in early 2008.

8 Summary and conclusions: how to evaluate the success of a project like “Future in the Alps”?

The role of knowledge transfer in regional development has been increasing in the last years. Therefore knowledge transfer activities have been set up under different frameworks: Knowledge transfer plays an important role in the new Swiss regional policy, “Learning Regions” are a focus of the 7th EU Framework Research Programme, the item of “Learning Regions” also stands for an initiative in the Austrian Rural Development Strategy 2007–2013. Also the EU LEADER programme and the INTERACT and ESPON initiatives of the European Commission focus on knowledge transfer. So “Future in the Alps” is in line with this trend.

In the project „Future in the Alps“, CIPRA tried to identify successful practical knowledge in the Alps, to transform this knowledge and to circulate this knowledge all over the Alps. The project team has reached nearly all of the project aims and expected outputs, some have even been exceeded. To give an example: in the initial project proposal, 5 international workshops have been foreseen. In reality 12 international workshops have been carried out. This change has been made because the project team came to the conclusion that direct physical meetings between stakeholders in an adequate framework would be most promising for the transfer and exchange of tacit knowledge – following the motto “High touch instead of high tech”. At the very beginning of the project it became clear, that such a complex project would need regular monitoring. Therefore a five person “reflection group” was installed. This group included a representative of the client, the president of CIPRA International, a public relation expert, a scientist and a regional planner. The project team and the reflection group held joint workshops at least once a year to discuss the present state of work, to analyse in detail main problems and to decide about modifications of the work programme, the time schedules and the financial allocation.

Although the complexity of the project was a big challenge mainly for the reflection group, the joint workshops turned out as helpful for the management of the project. During the first reflection workshops the question emerged, how the evaluation of success of a project like “Future in the Alps” could be done in a meaningful way. In general, the evaluation of knowledge transfer projects is still in its infancy. Projects like “Future in the Alps” dealing with the matter of trans-national, multi-

lingual, space- and actor-oriented knowledge transfer are very rare. Hence, evaluation of such projects do not exist so far – at least as far as the project team knows. Therefore, the evaluation of success of “Future in the Alps” is a kind of experiment itself. In order to give a certain base to this experiment, the project team proposed to orient the evaluation towards the practice of programmes and institutions dealing with knowledge transfer.

The evaluation standard of projects and programmes takes into account the following three aspects (European Commission 1999):

- Outputs: the products that are available at the end of a project (e.g. a report, a book);
- Outcomes: the results (e.g. new findings); and
- Impacts: the effects the project has. We can distinguish between short-, mid- and long-term effects as well as between direct and indirect effects.

This evaluation standard is used for the assessment of EU programmes like INTERREG, LEADER, etc. and it appears to be useful for the project evaluation of “Future in the Alps”. Hereby it is obvious that the evaluation of outputs and outcomes is manageable in the majority of cases, but the evaluation of impacts often faces serious problems. Often it is nearly impossible to identify the net effects of a project or programme, because these projects and programmes are normally embedded into a framework of various additional support programmes and market activities. Therefore, an evaluation of “Future in the Alps” at present stage has to focus on outputs and outcomes. The evaluation of impacts is a complex issue with a mid term perspective.

Programmes and institutions generating and transferring knowledge often use knowledge balances as an evaluation tool. Hereby knowledge is shown as intellectual capital, which can be described by following indicators (Begusch-Pfefferkorn 2006, Universität für Bodenkultur, 2005):

- Persons (human capital): qualification, fluctuation, age structures, management structures;
- Relations (relation capital): contacts, co-operation, collaboration in projects, network memberships, organisation of events, participation in committees, communities of interest, presence in media, etc.; and
- Infrastructure (structural capital): hard- and software, database contents and processes

In the scientific balance of the inter-and transdisciplinary oriented Austrian Landscape Research Programme (ALR, 1995–2005) following criteria have been used (Begusch-Pfefferkorn 2006):

- Scientific gains: publications and scientific activities, qualification in the scientific system, interdisciplinary networking;
- Internationalisation: number of international cooperation activities, number of international partners;
- Deployment in practice: publications and activities in practice, number of practical partners; and

- Additional leverage effects: additional resources for follow up projects, input into sectoral policies, national and international awards, giving room to language, gender aspects.

For more information about the Austrian Landscape Research Programme (ALR): <http://www.klf.at>

For the evaluation of “Future in the Alps” the project team has identified some key indicators, amongst them:

- identification of best practice examples and the present state of knowledge regarding the six thematic fields of the project
- success of conferences and workshops
- success of the online database
- success of the 3rd Alpine Report
- quality of the learning and teaching materials
- networking activities
- transfer of open and new questions to the scientific world
- approval of follow up projects
- quality of public relation activities
- quality of project management

A short term external ex post evaluation of “Future in the Alps” is carried out in spring 2008. In the course of this evaluation it will be decided, how the evaluation of mid term effects of “Future in the Alps” could be organised in a promising way.

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