



Evaluation of the Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention

Report to the 62. Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention to be held 11-12 October 2016,
Grassau (Germany)

1 The Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention

Since 2004 several activities were carried out in the Alpine region to implement an alpine ecological network as defined in Article 12 of the *Nature Protection Protocol* of the Alpine Convention. In the frame of the EU funded ETC Alpine Space Project ECONNECT (2008-2012), a number of alpine territories directly involved in the implementation of activities towards an ecological network addressed a request to the Platform Ecological Network of the Alpine Convention to officially support and recognize their efforts and contribution to the realization of a pan-alpine ecological network. As a response to this request, in 2010, the Platform Ecological Network of the Alpine Convention developed and adopted procedures for the nomination of Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity in the Alps¹. Areas to be nominated should be especially active in supporting an ecological network in the Alps.

According to the procedures nominations as Pilot Regions can be carried out at each Alpine Conference. The decision to recognize a Pilot Region is based on a questionnaire completed by the applying region. The questionnaire uses a number of criteria to gather details both on a region's ecological characteristics and its active contribution to sustainable development, as well as on concrete projects and measures, which help to promote an ecological network in the Alps. The completed questionnaire is evaluated according to a scores system. In order to be nominated, an area must obtain a minimum number of scores and/or, depending on the final scores, must have singularity status. The nomination is valid for a limited duration, but can be renewed after an evaluation. Since 2011 eight alpine regions have been officially nominated as Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention, after successfully completing the above described procedure. At the XIVth Alpine Conference (13 October 2016, Grassau, Germany) two additional Pilot Regions will be nominated.

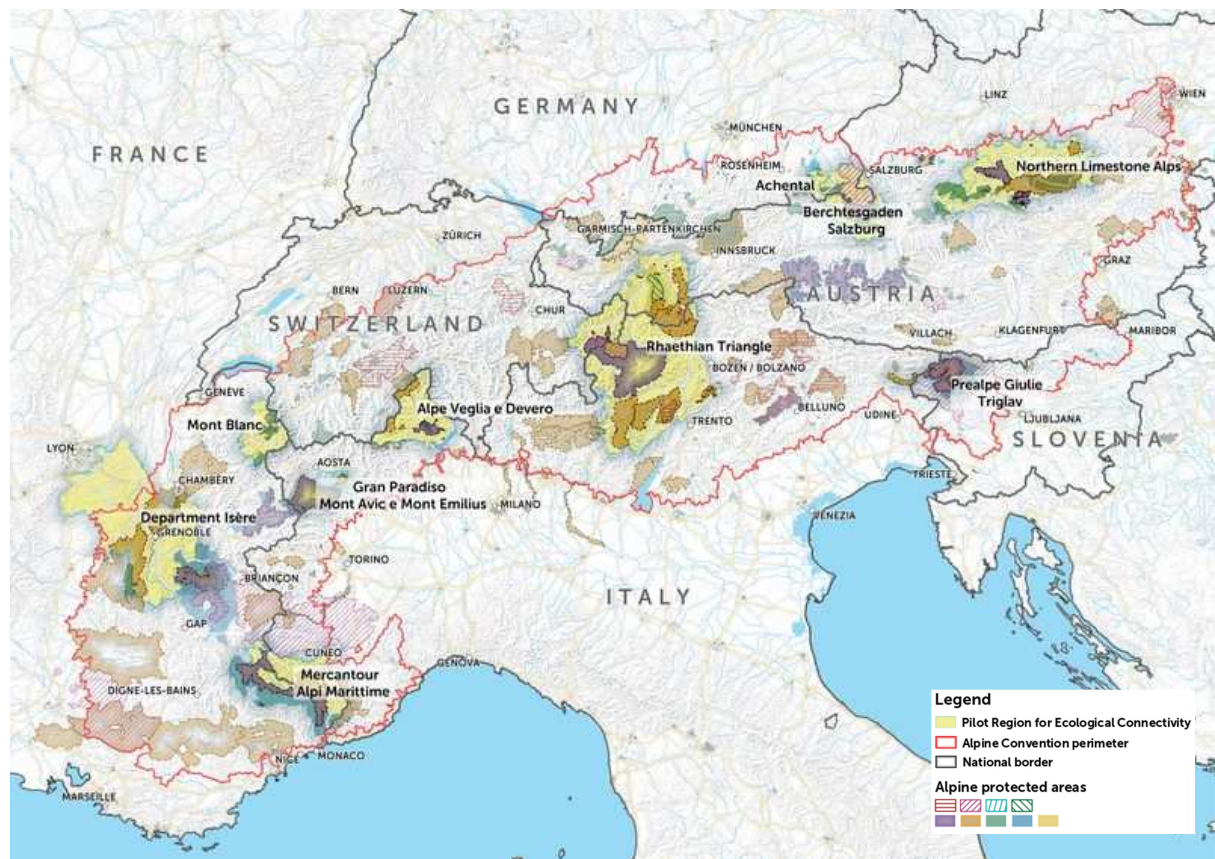
Currently the following Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention are listed (from south-west to north-east):

- South-western Alps (National Park Mercantour/Nature Park Alpi Marittime)
- French Department Isère
- Ecoregion Gran Paradiso - Mont Avic - Mont Emilius
- Ecoregion Mont-Blanc (to be nominated at XIVth Alpine Conference)

¹ http://www.alpconv.org/en/organization/groups/WGEcologicalNetwork/Documents/Pilotregionen_e-2.pdf

- Ecoregion Verbano-Cusio-Ossola
- Raethian triangle (Engadin/Southtyrol/Trentino/Tyrol)
- Achenal (to be nominated at XIVth Alpine Conference)
- Transboundary region Berchtesgaden - Salzburg
- Transboundary ecoregion Julian Alps
- Northern Limestone Alps region

Map of the Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention (October 2016)



Being nominated as a Pilot Region can result both, in socio-economic and ecological benefits. Besides, Pilot Regions can have an advantage to attract funding (through various funding mechanisms) for activities which contribute to promoting ecological connectivity. Meanwhile, this could be realized by several Pilot Regions in the past.

According to the adopted procedure the Pilot Regions have to be evaluated in a regular interval to demonstrate that they are still actively engaged in promoting and improving ecological connectivity. The evaluation of the existing Pilot Regions was carried from June to September 2016. The main results are summarized in this report.

2 Evaluation process for the Alpine Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity

The aim of the process was to verify that Pilot Regions, which would like to be furthermore designated as a Pilot Region for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention prove to be still

active in promoting and improving ecological connectivity both, at the local level and as a model region nationally. Besides, the evaluation should reveal progress on ecological connectivity that could be achieved in the region since the nomination and thus showcase best practices.

In the frame of the evaluation process, interviews were carried out by the Platform presidency with representatives of each Pilot Region - sometimes together with the respective country representatives of the Platform Ecological Network of the Alpine Convention. The interview covered the following aspects.

- The **activities** carried out, that contribute to an improvement of the ecological connectivity at local, subnational, national, and transboundary level, since 2011;
- an assessment of the **strength and weaknesses** of the activities carried out in the regions and at alpine level;
- the main **achievements** of the Pilot Region in the field of ecological connectivity since 2011;
- an outline of the **perspectives** for the future (what is planned for the future, what will be done in the next 2-4 years).

The findings from the evaluation process will be discussed with representatives of the Pilot Regions at a workshop to be held in the context of the second 2016 meeting of the Platform Ecological Network on 12 October 2016. The aim of the workshop is to provide a forum to present activities and approaches and to discuss experiences obtained in the various parts of the Alps. As a result of the workshop further cooperation possibilities as well as a shared strategy for the future will be outlined. Besides, at a side event during the Alpine Week, to be held in Grassau (Germany), 13 October 2016, the work of the Pilot Regions will be introduced to the public.

3 Main results of the Evaluation

The interviews with the representatives of the Pilot Regions showed that a number of activities directly linked to the **improvement of ecological connectivity** were carried out in all Pilot Regions since the first nomination in 2011. The range of activities and measures implemented by the Pilot Regions is large and diverse, including **concrete restoration activities** (for example the restoration of a water course in the Transboundary Pilot Region Berchtesgaden/Salzburg or the creation of a fish pass on a sill in the Breda River in the Pilot Region Isère) to **monitoring activities** (joint transboundary monitoring of chamois in the Pilot Region Julian Alps) or **environmental education** initiatives ("Network Natural Forest" Hiking trail in the Pilot Region Northern Limestone Alps; "Action days" for Volunteers in the Pilot Region Raethian Triangle).

With regard to the **governance model** implemented in the Pilot Regions as well as the main stakeholders and actors involved in connectivity activities, the situations in the Pilot Regions prove to be very different, based on the local context and the particularities of the region. In most regions the protected areas managers are the driving forces for the activities. The cooperation between different regional partners is formalized to different degrees, some have set up a regular meeting schedule, others are organizing their activities in a more informal way.

Nevertheless, all Pilot Regions showed it proved to be feasible to involve stakeholders from the major relevant sectors for ecological connectivity (agriculture, forestry, landscape- and spatial planning, tourism, nature protection etc.) in connectivity activities.

Concerning the main **achievements** of the Pilot Regions, the evaluation revealed a number of issues. One major achievement is related to the broader visibility and recognition of the importance of

conservation and biodiversity issues by decision-makers and the public. Even if changes in policy and legal context in the regions often depend on the wider political context, the developments that took place in some of the Pilot Regions (for example the establishment of the Regional Scheme of Ecological Coherence in the French Regions) and the consideration of Pilot Regions' activities in these developments, shows that their activities also contribute to increase the visibility for the need of ecological connectivity for biodiversity conservation on a larger policy level.

All Pilot Regions were, in addition, asked to provide some concrete outlooks for the future advancement of ecological connectivity in their territory and perspectives for their future activities. The outlooks presented by the Pilot Regions showed, inter alia, that the connectivity approach offers a multi-sectoral development and cooperation tool, which offers the possibility to unite actors from different sectors to jointly carry out projects for a sustainable development. The Transboundary Pilot Region Julian Alps, for example, has a medium-term perspective of creating a transboundary UNESCO Biosphere reserve and addressing the topic of ecological connectivity, alongside with other regional topics, in an international context in this new framework.

4 In Conclusion

All eight Pilot Regions nominated in 2011 successfully proved their continuous strong involvement on the topic of ecological connectivity, as well as their determination and motivation to pursue their activities in the next years and showed the concrete contribution which their work offers to the implementation of a pan-alpine ecological network as described by the Alpine Convention.

The Platform Ecological Network therefore confirms the recognition of all eight regions as Pilot Regions for Ecological Connectivity of the Alpine Convention for the upcoming four years.