

# Directions for Innovation in Alpine Tourist Destinations

TOWARDS INNOVATIVE TOURIST STRATEGIES IN  
ALPINE SITES

WORKING GROUP SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OF THE ALPINE  
CONVENTION (2016-2018)

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# 1. Introduction

As planned by the mandate of the Working Group Sustainable Tourism, the Presidency and the members agreed to dedicate a special event for analysing case studies and providing directions on the innovation of tourist destinations in the Alps.

The need was felt to concentrate on the main current challenges and expected future scenarios for Alpine tourist destinations, by asking speakers with direct experience in destination management, promotion of sustainable actions and scholars in the field of tourism and sustainability to illustrate their experiences and visions on the topic.

The principal aim of the contributions brought forward by the experts involved in supporting the implementation of this goal of the WG mandate was to provide material and knowledge to be used for developing innovative and sustainable territorial strategies. Innovation is required for constructing approaches being ideally able to ensure economic competitiveness in alpine tourist sites as well as a sustainable management of those Alpine assets and landscape that often represent major tourist attractions in the region.

The organisation of the Workshop "How can tourism contribute to the sustainable development of the Alps?" that took place in Bolzano (Italy) on April 24th 2018 at Eurac Research has allowed to collect significant updated information on the recent evolution of alpine tourism, promote an expert debate and develop a first knowledge base on the topic, by involving experts from different regions across the Alps and the WG as a whole.

Based on the discussions held in the Working Group Sustainable Tourism of the Alpine Convention, the Italian Delegation has promoted the Bolzano Workshop aiming to understand and explore different ways for tourism to contribute to sustainable regional development in the Alps. This first event in a small row will be an opportunity to "make a point" about initiatives for sustainable tourism in the mountains, that will be followed by other events to be held in different locations across the Alps.

Cross-sectoral innovation is central for Alpine tourism: the introductory speech will deal with "innovation" in tourism, then the workshop will provide inputs and case-studies on cross-cutting

fields like health, culture, and agriculture, linking these fields with the meaning of innovation. This will allow us to continue to discuss on the topic of innovation in other future events that we plan to organize. Also, an experience about sports events is included in the program as well as an interesting experience with metrics for the sustainability of major events as applied in Cortina d'Ampezzo (Italy).

The Workshop allowed to discuss together with academics, experts and tourist operators on the future of alpine tourism and on the expected development of this sector in the Alps.

The event saw the participation of stakeholders from the tourist sector (hotels, resorts, sports, etc.), municipalities, local tourist promotion agencies and alpine national and regional governments.

In this brief document we collected a scientific contribution on “scenario setting” for sustainable development of the tourist sector in the Alps as well as the presentations held at the Workshop as food for thoughts for all the stakeholders around the Alps being involved in tourist development and in the challenge to promote and possibly achieve a greater sustainability of the whole sector.

We would like to thank very much the authors of the salient scientific contribution reported in this document as well as all the speakers who joined the workshop and allowed such a collection to be enriched by their precious contributions.

## **2. Sustainable Tourism Scenarios for the Alps**

*Harald Pechlaner, Giulia Isetti (Eurac research)*

The recently concluded 2018 UNFCCC Climate Change Conference in Katowice, Poland, has had the purpose to implement the decisions of the Paris Agreement (2015). Although it is - as expected - difficult to reach concrete arrangements, and even more to apply them in practice, the resulting call for accountability of human actions not only to the environment, but also to the society at large is very clear. The call to action on this issue, not only refers to national governments, but also to the civil society, since it is increasingly clear that the needed commitment cannot be limited to looking for technical solutions aimed at neutralizing emissions and to a transition to new approaches to resource-management, but has to include an effort and a willingness to deeply change our civilization and culture.

The ecological and social crises are strictly interconnected: one cannot be resolved without the other, as also proclaimed by the Pope in the Encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015).

According to a recent study, international tourism is responsible for around 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions. In the process of raising awareness and inducing responsibility, it is natural when talking about the development of tourist destinations, to reflect on how to solve the apparent trade-off between protecting the environment, and looking for economic profitability and social equity for local communities - in an attempt to striking the delicate balance among three central factors for sustainable tourism. Today tourist destinations face many challenges, including the shorter stay of guests, late bookings, more demanding visitors showing more individualistic tendencies. All these challenges apply well to Alpine destinations, which have to deal with a greater sensitivity to climate change, as recorded in recent years. According to forecasts, in the year 2100 the average air temperature in the Alps might increase by some 2°C - impacting the “line of snow reliability” for ski resorts by 300 metres, from 1500 to 1800 metres a.s.l. However, these changes should not bring us to envisage a gloomy future for alpine tourism. On the contrary, they might even be concrete opportunities for those destinations, being able to adapt themselves, and their tourist products and offers to changing conditions and contexts, thus giving proof of both resilience and spirit of innovation.

Tourism in the Alps presents a wide variety of features: each Alpine resort, not only ski resorts, owns specific characteristics, linked to a unique combination of structural, environmental, political, socio-cultural and technological factors. The geographical position plays a role in defining the positioning of a destination for the targeted guests, e.g. proximity / distance from cities, altitude, the inclusion within large ski areas. As a consequence, also tourist products, offers and themes related to snow and the Alps are diverse - which makes it difficult to forecast possible scenarios for the sustainable development of tourism in the Alps. Nevertheless, the future prospects can be traced back to two possible models.

The first perspective – i.e. a *development scenario for consolidated destinations*, particularly refers to those tourist destinations, as it is the case with many winter tourist resorts, which are already in their maturity phase – frequently found e.g. in France and Switzerland. Aiming at keeping their competitiveness, they often network with each other and develop a common offer, for example by connecting different ski areas and expanding the domain skiable for their guests. This type of destinations can offer not only products, but primarily experiences to tourists. This translates into a need for frequent innovation, which in turn requires significant economic investments. The places that have already experienced an intensive development and wish to keep their standards are suitable to continuously update and reinvent themselves. This does not translate into technical progress alone, but mainly refers to a combination of de-seasonalization, product diversification (e.g. new sports, gastronomy, wellness facilities, shopping, and cultural events), organization and marketing schemes, e.g. through cooperation with less developed destinations nearby. It is often possible and advisable to create synergies with minor closer destinations in different domains, ranging from visitor flows management, to promotion and marketing, to creating the case for niche and slow tourism. Niche tourism is not typically found under such a scenario, however it can be a part of it. Even though mass tourism tends to prevail in these destinations, sometimes resulting in a "resortification" of the site (e.g. integration of the hotel and ski facilities sectors). This is not necessarily bad and does not exclude sustainability, if other players in the destination can also benefit from tourism development, not only from the economic point of view but also in their quality of life.

At the same time, these large tourist centers ideally should be restructured from the socio-cultural and ecological point of view, through a "re-regionalization" process, aiming both at

restoring local economies, and avoiding a loss of identity for the site due to the “fake authenticity” that is sometimes offered to visitors. Locations that have gone through a more intensive path of development can also contribute to sustainability by implementing measures of energy and resource-efficiency, dismantling and re-naturalization.

The “quantitative” development phase seems to have ended: it has to leave room to a “qualitative” one. The current tourist offer should go towards a “premium” dimension - e.g. by increasing and improving the skiing offer through new connections, guaranteeing high quality services and, above all, remembering that ski as a product, by itself is no longer sufficient for sustaining a tourist destination. In turn, a transition from "ski tourism" to "snow tourism" is needed.

Diversification remains fundamental regardless of the altitude of the resort and the presence of snow in the future, since all ski areas should reframe their offer due to the ongoing demographic change of our future society. The trend towards an older population can have a great potential for ecological tourism, as it is more inclined to "soft" activities on the snow, e.g. walks, snowshoeing, sledding and discovery of nature. On the other hand, new generations should not be forgotten: although numerically lower than adult tourists, younger tourists should be lured through themes and offers related to youthful lifestyles, for example through “adrenaline activities” like snowkiting and snowbiking, offered in combination with other sports or leisure activities.

However, this is not necessarily the only direction that Alpine tourism can and must take. Such a choice would require external investment that is likely to create a dependency of a destination from corporations and external players, less aware of, and probably less interested in, the social, environmental and economic internal balance of the destination. This could be especially true for new destinations that have been turning to tourism in recent years.

Under these circumstances, we can therefore look for the second perspective, i.e. a *development scenario for emerging destinations* – which is well suited to those places that are, especially in summer, typically characterized by scarcely mature tourist products, or simply do not have them. This type of scenario should not focus on quantity, but rather on quality – that ideally is an important feature of both scenarios. This choice allows positioning the destinations on the market

in a unique way, being able to attract only one type of guests, who can appreciate, and be willing to safeguard, the context where they spend their holiday.

Moreover, this category of visitors is constantly expanding and, according to a recent survey on the global level, would also be willing to spend more money for accommodation, food and mobility services, and at the same time for reducing the negative impacts of the stay. The economic effect of an increased willingness to pay should be shared among the tourist stakeholders that jointly build a local tourist offer. They are part to an integrated, homogenous system where they are allowed to keep their unique skills.

A consistent model of tourist development for this case should promote climate-friendly practices, "soft" tourism (e.g. agri-tourism, eco-tourism and low-impact tourist mobility as it is the case with the municipalities in the Alpine Pearls Network or the Bergsteigerdörfer). The resulting model of tourism is niche-focused, based on sustainable mobility, zero-km products, rediscovery of local traditions and culture and it is in contact with uncontaminated nature, where infrastructure is minimal, with no losses in the quality of the offer and services. If it is true that niche differs from mass-tourism in quantity, it is also true that its success as a model risks transforming it from a niche into a mass phenomenon. Such a change could end up in threatening the integrity of the tourism system itself, as it is the case with some natural parks and several UNESCO WHL sites, where the uncontaminated landscape and traditional cultural values are literally "besieged" by visitors.

In order to go ahead on the road to sustainability, and reduce the negative impacts of an increasing amount of tourists, it is advisable to act proactively and decisively in order to manage tourist flows. A few possible actions include:

- establishing areas with no access to traditional vehicles and facilitating access to alternative forms of mobility (e.g. e-bikes and electric vehicles renting, free public transport, etc.),
- setting up a maximum number of visitors allowed to be in a site,
- encouraging the de-seasonalization or the distribution of visitors throughout the day by means of specific offers,
- implementing technologies (app and social media),

- promoting cooperation between more and less intensely frequented destinations for an optimal visitors' flow management.

None of the development scenarios described above excludes sustainability for those destinations that decide to seek to propose a sustainable tourist model. However, a genuine sustainable tourist offer can hardly be achieved with a “laissez-faire” approach. A sustainable development of Alpine tourist destinations can only be obtained if planning, management and thus monitoring of tourist activities are implemented, through a governance system not left to a single formal institution (e.g. a public administration), but rather involving all the stakeholders in the territory, where skills and responsibilities are clearly set. This approach aims to ensure that everyone - including the local environment – and not only a small minority of subjects, enjoys and benefits from the initiatives enhancing territorial development initiatives.

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### **3. Conference Program and Reports**

**WELCOME ADDRESSES / 9.30 – 10.00**

**INTRODUCTORY SPEECH / 10.00 – 10.30**

**Which is the contribution of the tourism to the sustainable development in the Alpine region? /**

*Mr. HARALD PECHLANER, Head of Center for Advanced Studies, Eurac Research - Chair of Tourism, Center for Entrepreneurship Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt*

**KEYNOTES**

**Health tourism as a chance for the Alps? / 10.30 – 10.50**

*Mr. ARNULF HARTL, Director of Institute of Ecomedicine Paracelsus Medical University Salzburg*

**Cultural and agritourism in the Alps: a sustainable way for economic development / 10.50 – 11.10**

*Ms. ANTONELLA DRAPPERO, Destination Manager in the area Valli di Lanzo (Piemonte, Italy)*

**COFFE BREAK / 11.10 – 11.25**

**Can sport and other events as touristic products contribute to the sustainable development of the Alpine region? / 11.25 – 11.45**

*Mr. GERHARD VANZI, Senior Researcher at Eurac Research*

**CASE STUDY / 11.45 – 12.00**

**Approaches to the sustainability of winter sports: the Cortina Chapter**

**ROUND TABLE / 12.00 – 13.00**

*Moderator: Mrs. MARA CERNIC, President of the Working Group Sustainable Tourism of the Alpine Convention*