

# Governance and participatory planning

Contemporary spatial development challenges in the Alps, connected to climate change, demographic change, transportation, natural hazards, and other issues, refer to all spatial levels, from local to transnational, to formal actors and those not part of political establishment and governmental jurisdictions. Therefore, spatial planning may not only reflect the views of the government, but should connect all stakeholders into a partnership, providing a solid structure for sustainable spatial development through inclusion of actors, governance, and participatory planning.

## Recommendations to policy makers and civil servants

- **Focus on functional areas**

The historical background, traditions, and cultures in the Alpine area are also reflected in various forms of cooperation that exist between and within Alpine regions. Once production chains and provision of services were localized and limited to local supply and demand, but this has changed considerably in direction of the complex, large-scale, cross-sectoral character of contemporary setting of spatial, social, and economic relations. Therefore functional areas have broadened, and spatial processes such as climate change, natural hazards, and so on are often managed at the macro-regional (Alpine) or even global levels. In this regard, administrative regions do not fit the requirements of contemporary planning and planning should thus refer to broader functional areas, which differ by area, sector, and problem. Connections at the level of functional regions have several advantages: the entire system in the entire area of influence can be planned and thus a greater level of integration of the area can be achieved in addition to better interconnection between the measures taken, which can be reflected in better results at the level of all administrative units included. The focus on the entire area of influence also makes it possible to include all of the driving forces, which can provide more comprehensive solutions (Nared and Razpotnik Visković 2012).

- **Overcome borders**

Transition towards functional regions, also supported by European territorial cooperation, requires various forms of cross-border cooperation. To overcome borders, one could join one of the Alpine transnational networks that represent new models of coordination and governance, a new politics of horizontal relations. These interlink various actors that are concerned with the protection and sustainable development of the Alps (CIPRA), protected areas (Alparc), municipalities (Alliance in the Alps), small businesses (NENA), cities (Alpine Town of the Year), researchers (ISCAR), tourism resorts (Alpine Pearls), and many other areas. A further step in cross-border cooperation is transnational and cross-border projects. The financial support of partners from the seven Alpine countries makes it possible to overcome national borders and promote sustainable spatial development together at the transnational level. Another form of European territorial cooperation is cross-border cooperation, which is even more focused on problems arising from contact between two different administrative systems and on issues shared by regions on both sides of the border. Successful projects provide not only solutions for their regions, but also to similar problems in other regions.

- **Upgrade government with governance**

Management of areas and sectors is normally clearly defined in various acts, building the framework at various government levels, but some undefined areas can still be found where the jurisdictions and competences are blurred, being either a matter shared by various sectors or at different territorial

levels, or where different institutions deal with residents' expectations. In such cases, when competences and interests interweave (and this is particularly true in an international community like the Alpine area), common solutions should be sought by joining all crucial stakeholders into a process in which matters are discussed and decided upon mutually. Governance does not replace the jurisdictions of the countries or institutions engaged, but particularly binds them in areas where joint effort provides additional benefits to all parties. Inclusion in the decision-making process is especially important for local residents due to their implicit knowledge, which could effectively fit solutions taken to the local environment (Nared and Razpotnik Visković 2014).

- **Find your own form of cooperation**

The examples of cooperation described above lead to the conclusion that there is no uniform concept of cooperation. Both informal cooperation in the sense of voluntary, participatory decision-making, and the establishment of a more formalized joint institution in charge of developing policies for all the units included can be successful. Cooperation in some form is essential, regardless of which form it takes, provided that a clear definition of jurisdictions is given. In the case of joint bodies, their range of activities, sources of funding, and how they include individual stakeholders must be specified. In the case of informal governance structures, it makes sense to define clear processes to reach consensus, and a joint facilitator to manage the process. Even if the decision-making process is informal, an umbrella institution should supervise the process and be responsible for implementing the agreed-upon activities. Solutions should also be sought in a consensus between all the actors involved because only in this way will the joint body be able to achieve satisfactory results (Nared and Razpotnik Visković 2012).

- **Include stakeholders from the very beginning**

The starting point of participatory planning must be honest inclusion of all stakeholders in the planning process, in which the stakeholders are not only included in the process from the first steps of the planning process, but should potentially be the initiators and the driving force of the process. In this regard, the planning procedures and roles of stakeholders included should be clearly defined in advance:

- Define the issues and the scale of challenges at stake.
- Invite a network of stakeholders in the selected topic and the issue to be tackled.
- Encourage stakeholders to actively participate. Discuss their proposals, adapt them, and include them in plans wherever possible.
- Try to highlight the main alternative suggestions and opinions and, where possible, achieve broad agreement on the joint vision and solutions.
- Implement the plans agreed upon. Start with working groups on specific topics with all political, administrative, and planning authorities. Ensure that there are sufficient resources to follow up the advice and recommendations (Nared and Razpotnik Visković 2012).

- **Provision of an effective and transparent communication platform**

On the basis of the joint recognition of the extent and character of common challenges, a joint platform for communication and cooperation should be established for planning and implementing activities. To establish a joint platform, the roles and issues of potential conflict of the participating authorities should be identified and resolved as far as possible. A cooperation platform can be established in various ways: through a common communication and information platform, which provides detailed information to all political, administrative, and planning bodies, through working groups that work together on common issues, through volunteer associations, or through joint institutions that provide planning activities for all entities included. A joint cooperation platform should be seen as a generic term. Joint bodies for sustainable spatial development may be established as an important step towards more comprehensive integration at a future date (Nared and Razpotnik Visković 2012).

- **Include decisions in planning documents**

Including stakeholders has manifold benefits such as strengthened connectedness to the region, enhanced local culture and tradition, and new solutions provided by connecting different aspects, but if the decisions of the participatory process are not taken seriously the process might become counterproductive and could cause additional mistrust. To this end, participatory planning should not use the participatory process to inform inhabitants about decisions made and thus expect their goodwill, but should truly put them in a position to decide or at least guide the decisions at the highest possible level. Thus, planning would not simply obtain acceptance from the inhabitants, but would at the same time provide necessary legitimacy to the decisions made and to the entire planning process.

## **Recommendations to the Alpine Space MA in order to put more emphasis on spatial development issues in 2014+**

- **Stimulate a cross-sectoral approach, participatory processes, and governance**

Complex processes require different management approaches than have been needed in the past, and very often problems cannot be resolved by one actor alone. To successfully face this complex reality, actors must work together and strive to find mutual and satisfying solutions for all the parties concerned. Working together on a common issue provides better results because various viewpoints are included, and searching for consensus will prevent individual interests from dominating others. A new program period must therefore strengthen the aspirations towards a cross-sectoral, inclusive participatory approach and governance. All of these are crucial for reaching a higher level of consensus and more sustainable development of the Alps. New calls should identify cross-sectoral cooperation, participation/inclusion of stakeholders, and governance as a mandatory element of the new projects, ensuring a broader impact of expected project results.

- **Facilitate and develop participatory methodology**

Many projects in the Alpine Space Programme for 2007–2013 have used participatory processes as one of their main methodological approaches. Each of them has developed their own manner of cooperation and thus a great variety of participatory methods appeared without a sufficient methodological foundation. One of the most obvious weaknesses of the participatory processes is their unrepresentativeness. Many project partners think that implementing participatory processes is a guarantee for solid and reliable results, but the reality might prove the opposite; namely, a low level of participation and underrepresentation of groups that do not have sufficient knowledge or interest in participating could lead to inconsistent and unreliable results. Therefore one of the options would be to establish a special group, helping projects and partners implement appropriate methods and developing new methods adapted to the special features of the Alpine area. For example, due to major distances and language constraints, stakeholders from across the Alps are not likely to commonly discuss a certain problem at a single location. In this regard, new information and communication technologies, especially social networks, offer a new opportunity that cannot be neglected in the future programming period. IC tools might also help increase the number of stakeholders involved, and automatize and improve participation in planning processes. To ensure reliability, methodological foundations must be further analysed. One of the inputs could be a shared manual on participatory processes, preventing duplication of the methodological endeavours of each individual project.

- **The Alpine area should become a model for governance of a European macro-region**

The Alpine area is a typical area where joint actions are needed even though the entire area is divided into several countries and regions, and many municipalities. In addition, there is a strong urban-rural interaction among Alpine areas and pre-Alpine mega centres. Because the problems and issues are shared, the responsible authorities must strive to find a proper way of cooperation, providing them with solutions that are effective (in terms of results) and efficient (in terms of resources invested). Close cooperation in the past, existing institutions (like the Alpine Convention) or networks (CIPRA, ISCAR, etc.), and the existing financial scheme (the Alpine Space Programme) are a huge contribution towards more sustainable development of the Alps and particularly towards a common management system able to address common challenges at the entire Alpine level. By fostering the idea of cooperation and joint decision-making, the Alpine area could become a model for governance of a European macro-region.

*References: - Nared, J., Razpotnik Visković, N. (eds.) 2012: Moving people: Towards sustainable mobility in European metropolitan regions. Potsdam; - Nared, J., Razpotnik Visković, N. (eds.) 2014: Managing cultural heritage sites in Southeastern Europe. Ljubljana.*

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