

Green economy

According to United Nations Environment Programme, '[a] green economy [is] one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities'.¹⁾

The European Environment Agency refers this concept to 'sectors (e.g. energy), topics (e.g. pollution), principles (e.g. polluter pays) or policies (e.g. economic instruments). It can also describe an underpinning strategy, such as the mainstreaming of environmental policies or a supportive economic structure.'²⁾



Image courtesy: pixabay.com

Green Economy in the Alpine Convention Area

It is a long-term goal for the Alpine Convention area to shift towards a Green Economy, one which “considers and respects the environmental limits of the Alpine area, takes into account global challenges like climate change and limited natural resources, and supports the quality of life and well-being of its residents.” The 6th Report on the state of the Alps released by the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention in 2017, titled “Greening the Economy in the Alpine Region”³⁾

contains suggestions for making the economy in the Alps eco-friendlier. The process of greening Alpine economy is illustrated in three main 3 goals:

- High energy and resource efficiency
- Clean and renewable energy
- Greening GDP by technological innovation

The report addresses these goals in 4 main topics:

- [Energy-efficient and low-carbon economy](#)
- [Resource-efficient economy](#)

- [Ecosystem services and natural capital-based economy](#)
- [An economy supporting quality of life and well-being](#)

Energy-efficient and low-carbon economy

To begin with, a green economy is a low-carbon one. A low-carbon economy implies an economic model in which greenhouse gas emissions are minimised, mostly by reducing usage of fossil fuels. Despite of much effort of Alpine countries in decreasing their carbon footprint, nowadays CO₂ emissions are still high in the region.

According to the report, a shift towards renewable energy sources is key to greening the economy in the Alpine region, especially where a sole focus on efficiency by reducing energy consumption might produce less results than what was so far believed. Amidst renewable energy production in the Alpine region, biomass and hydropower have currently the biggest share.

Resource-efficient economy

Greening the economy of the Alpine regions presents some major challenges related to resource-efficiency. The report presents the path towards a resource-efficient economy in the Alps to rest upon three main pillars:

- (1) efficient use of non-energy resources
- (2) land use changes and
- (3) circular economy, recycling and waste management

Efficient use of non-energy resources

First, the Alpine economy rests largely on raw materials from other regions. This brings about an impact on the places where these resources are produced. The authors of the report claim that less import could have positive impact inside and outside the Alpine region, such as: reduced environmental pressure, lower material purchasing costs, competitiveness and possibilities for innovation. The change into new requires an increase in resource productivity and an absolute reduction of material input.

Land use changes

Concurrently, development of industry and real estate have also a high impact on resources, bringing about air and water pollution, and soil sealing, while making large portions of land pollute the air, water and make the soil permanently unusable in other purposes.

This poses a problem especially in the Alps, where accessible grounds are much more limited than in the lowlands and population density is often comparable with the one of larger urban conglomerations in the lowlands.

Circular economy, recycling and waste management

Unlike a linear economy that follows a make-dispose model, in a circular economy, resource inputs

and waste are minimised by maintaining closed loops of reuse and recycling. However, the effects of a circular economy reach beyond the reuse and recycling of waste; they also support a reconsideration of production and consumption patterns which can foster both technological, organisational and social innovations. This brings about opportunities for new forms of product design, community cooperation and business models for the Alps.

Ecosystem services and natural capital-based economy

The economy of the Alpine region relies heavily on natural capital. This is especially relevant for mountain farming, mountain forestry, water management, tourism and recreation, and urban development. To measure and analyse the value and assets nature provides the concept of ecosystem services can come particularly useful. Among other, this concept can serve as a tool and basis for the identification of conflicts in the provision of [ecosystem services](#) generated by different and competing land uses and land use changes.

In the context of natural capital, [biodiversity](#) holds a unique value. The existence of biodiversity supports appropriate development of agriculture and forestry. Local flora and fauna are as well the base for promoting tourism. Biodiversity can be a valuable source of know-how for new solutions, what is often not enough appreciated.

The quality of the environment in the Alps affects ecosystems on whole Europe, as, for example, large European rivers Danube, Po, Rhone and Rhine, originate in this area.

An economy supporting quality of life and well-being

Following the initiative 'Economy for the Common Good' launched by Austrian author Christian Felber in 2010, the report advances green economy as an economy that increases 'the quality of life for all and not the wealth of a few'⁽⁴⁾.

First of all, green economy fosters a cleaner environment, which has a positive impact on human health. Reduced pollution means less problems with diseases and higher self-comfort.

Secondly, a green economy can create new, bigger green jobs market. Professionals such as engineers, mechanics, product designers, recycling specialist will can get new opportunities for employment also locally. To provide a reference, in 2012 already around 2.2 Million people were engaged in environmental protection positions in Germany.

In addition, the inclusive nature of new solutions can provide wider access to health protection service, schools and better exploitation of local skills. New job positions will bring about a higher consume demand and a more sustainable consumer behaviour.

Studies show that the awareness among consumers in Europe is raising. Today we can find the actions such as: [running repair cafés](#), [supporting regional products](#) and [implementing local currencies](#).

Efforts made by authorities and the people towards more sustainable and environment-aware forms of development and behaviours seem to represent a positive forecast for the green economy concept in the old continent in general, and in the Alps notably.

[biodiversity](#), [ecosystem services](#), [AlpES project](#), [Alpine Convention](#)

1)

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³⁾

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Ibid, 37.

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Last update: **2018/07/09 12:12**

