

WIKIAlps Transnational Working Tables

The two transnational working tables took place on the 6 May in Innsbruck (Austria) with stakeholders from the eastern part of the Alps and on the 28 May in Courmayeur (Italy) with those from the western part of the Alps.

Aim, Organization and Participants

Our two main aims of the working tables were to understand the main transnational issues in an Alpine spatial development that regions and countries face and to publicly present WIKIAlps – the project's wiki.

Both working tables were structured in the same way. Impulse presentations from the WIKIAlps team were followed by animated and very fruitful small group discussions among the participating stakeholders both in the morning and in the afternoon. Moderated by WIKIAlps project partners, participants expressed their opinions and experiences with regard to spatial planning and spatial development in their regions/areas.

A total of 37 stakeholders took part in the transnational working tables. We were able to welcome 13 participants from Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland to the Innsbruck working table and 24 from France, Italy and Switzerland to the Courmayeur event. The participants had very heterogeneous backgrounds ranging from regional development experts over representatives from public bodies to researchers with or without experience in Alpine Space projects – all with a deep interest in how to support a transnational Alpine spatial development.

Results

In the following, we summarise some of the results of the group discussions among the stakeholders that participated in the Innsbruck and Courmayeur working tables, and will present some interesting facts.

1. What about spatial development in the Alpine space? POSITIVE and NEGATIVE EXAMPLES from different regions

POSITIVE:

- Tyrol's strategy of focusing on sustainable tourism and the promotion of high quality products is a good example. Products are recognised on the market, consumers are willing to pay higher prices and therefore farmers are able to benefit from higher prices than in other regions.
- In the Rhine valley, there is a good example for intermunicipal cooperation. There are incentives for making public buildings more sustainable.
- The new federal regional policy in Switzerland aims at reducing the economic fragmentation and supporting polycentric development. In particular, the Confederation supports only the Interreg projects that align with the new policy centred on innovation, economics and territorial competitiveness. The projects in the cultural field, for example, can get funds from cantons but not from the Confederation.

- The Espace Mont-Blanc is a good and almost unique example of cross-border cooperation between thirty-five municipalities (the smallest territorial unit) from three different countries around the Mont-Blanc (Italy, France and Switzerland). The Espace Mont-Blanc can be considered as an Alpine laboratory of transnational cooperation.
<http://www.espace-mont-blanc.com>
- The SCOT (Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale) of the Grenoble region is the current strategic planning document within the region. Local planning documents and projects need to follow the goals of the SCOT, e.g. rules of local planning are to be applied to limit urban sprawl and to contribute to a more balanced territorial development. <http://www.region-grenoble.org/>

NEGATIVE:

- Urban sprawl and land take were pointed as two of the main problems related to spatial development in the Alpine Space, where land is very scarce.
- The lack of information about best practices or local pilot activities at the national level as well as the knowledge gap at the local level.
- Discrepancy, inconsistency and conflicts among policies and objectives at the different administrative levels, e.g. becoming energy autonomous and number one in tourism.
- Often it is not easy for spatial planning to overcome national borders, e.g. nature protection sometimes stops at national borders.
- Concerning the official documents at the transnational level, the participants pointed out that EU-policies are advantageous but they are not always very well linked to the specific problems of the mountain territories. Policies that deal with mountain issues use a centre-periphery approach with the mountain territories distributed at the edge of the cities' areas.

2. How are borders perceived in the Alpine space?

From both working tables it appeared that many participants **perceive** "internal" borders between regions or municipalities in the same country a greater challenge than borders between countries. According to the participants this is due to different conflicts of interest that lead to a strong competition in matters like tourism, economic development, and industry development that can impede a well-working collaboration among others. Participants mentioned in both working tables that the perception of the transnational borders and willingness to cooperate depend heavily on the topic addressed. Topics that are commonly addressed transnationally are for example nature conservation, natural hazards, risk management and traffic ...

3. Who are the relevant KEYPLAYERS in Alpine spatial development?

- Key players in spatial development and transnational projects:
 - Civil society: citizens, associations, cultural associations, NGOs, farmers.
 - Private sector: Large companies, state companies, SMEs, trade associations, forums, public utility.
 - Academic: universities, research centers.
 - Institutional: policy makers, administration, local authorities (are the most important players for a sustainable development in the Alps, as they have the power to act autonomously and that is why it is important they have the right competences.)
- New models of governance require the participation of different stakeholders at different levels. Those actors, who have a direct link with the territory, should be involved more directly in order to enrich the debate and to add different perspectives.

- Processes are usually driven by the availability of land. Land owners, energy companies, cable car companies, developers of housing projects are usually the key players in the Alpine space.

4. TRANSNATIONAL NEEDS in Alpine spatial development:

- Stronger transnational cooperation in tourism, nature conservation, economic clusters, urban and transport development...
- Information dissemination and awareness raising:
 - Public
 - Decision makers
- A shared and participatory approach, starting participation as early as possible with well informed citizens. The Espace Mont-Blanc's partners are trying to do this with the new "Stratégie d'avenir".
- Cooperation requires time, efforts and the involvement of different actors that have different visions and expectations.

5. WIKIALPS - Reactions and first impressions

Note of the WIKIALps partners: In a nutshell, the first impressions of the newly presented wiki were very positive, but of course, there is still a lot to do. The participant's feedback was very constructive and we are currently engaged with improving our wiki.

The participants' feedback:

- The wiki already contains a lot of useful information on Alpine spatial development issues and it is easy to use. It gives a valuable overview on Alpine Space projects and their results, literature and stakeholders. The wiki seems to be capable to satisfy the demand of stakeholders who deal with similar issues and problems in other countries.
- The possibility to explore the data and contents of the wiki in different ways was appreciated.
- The wiki is able to give a good visibility to the results of (former) Alpine Space projects offering a structured and organised overview and applies to a common analysis framework.
- Since the wiki language is English, this could impede potential users to access it, especially local ones.
- Since researchers and practitioners have diverging approaches and speak "different languages" it seems to be difficult to adapt the language used in the wiki to all target groups.
- Although the wiki already provides a good overview, there is still room for improvement: the participants would appreciate to have more internal links between articles and keywords, more information about certain topics would be of interest and the search function could still be enhanced by categorising articles.
- For the future, an extension of the wiki's content to other Alpine Space projects or even to projects from different programmes would be desirable.

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