The Alpine Convention:
A Framework Treaty for 8 Countries, Its Benefits and Merits

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In this paper it shall be demonstrated, how eight states cooperate in the management of a commonly owned natural feature, the Alps, and what measures must be taken to achieve the best benefit for all participating countries. A framework treaty provides the legal base for transboundary projects with the aim to collaborate in scientific, social, cultural, economic, ecologic and nature bound topics and to meet the challenges of the climate change. All these activities contribute to create a peaceful and harmonious climate of confidence between the partners, and to bring this work to be a win-win situation for all.

1. Introduction

The *Alpine Convention* is a framework convention with the goal to protect the natural environment and to promote the development of this region in its manifold facettes. The Alpine range is shared by 8 countries (the states of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland, see fig. 1) and the EU, which are all participating nations in the Alpine Convention. Protocols and declarations dealing with specific topics complete the convention. This convention stands for a sustainable development and protection of the Alpine region in its entirety.[1]

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[1] www.alpconv.org

Figure 1. The Alpine Range
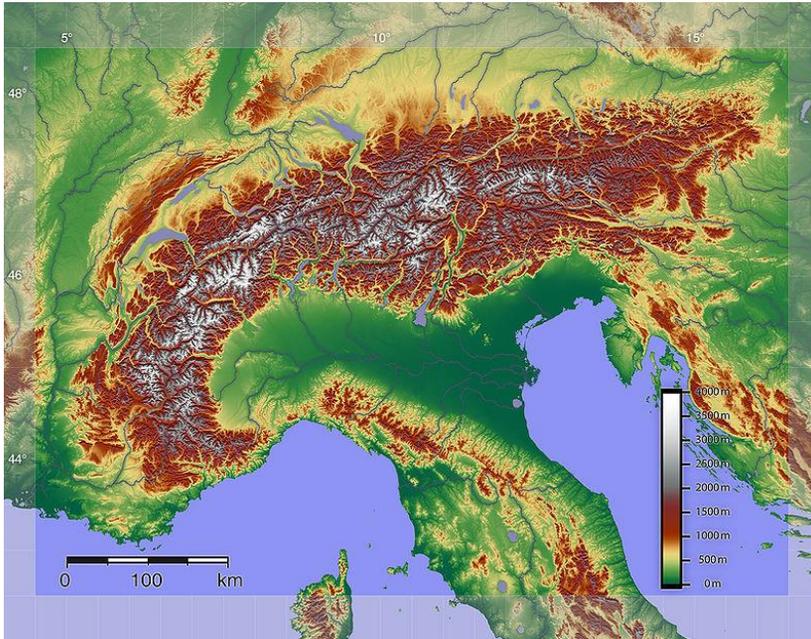
Source: Wikipedia (accessed 30-06-2015)

The Ministers of the Parties to the Alpine Convention
Regard the socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects mentioned in Article 2,
Paragraph 2, Item a., as being central to the implementation of an integrated
policy to ensure the protection and sustainable development of the Alpine area.
They hold the conviction that the value of the Alpine area lies in its diversity.[2]

The Alpine convention holds several oberservers, one of the main NGO observers is CIPRA (International Commission for the Protection of the Alps). It promotes the **EU strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)** and lays weight on a strategy, a „solidarity", including the surrounding areas of the Alps, denominated as a future macro-region.[3] The Alpine Space Programme 2014-2020 (http://www.alpine-space.eu) is regarded as complementary and not as a competitive programme to the Alpine convention:

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[2] http://www.alpconv.org/en/convention/protocols/Documents/PopCult_en.pdf

[3] "… a macro-region is an area that covers various states or regions that are linked by one or more common characteristics or challenges. The Alps have such common features and certainly fit this definition…" (http://www.cipra.org/en/positions/118)

"The Alpine Space programme is a European transnational cooperation pro-gramme for the Alpine region. It provides a framework to facilitate the **cooperation between economic, social and environmental key players in seven Alpine countries**, *as well as between various institutional levels such as: academia, administration, business and innovation sector, and policy making…".*

The EUSALP is therefore committed to preserving and promoting cultural diversity in the Alps as well as to building bridges and fostering dialogue between cultures.

In the following sentences I concentrate on the cultural aspects of the Alpine Convention and on the achievements reached through this treaty.

2. What are or were the preconditions for these comprising protective measures for the Alps?

The Alps have a vast biodiversity capital, water and wood reserves, and after all they are **the cultural and economic environment for about 14 million people.** Their natural attractivity makes them to a favoured tourist destination for approximately 120 million guests every year. The heritage of nature and Alpine culture plays an important role in this context.[4]

1) Legal status of the Convention

The Alpine Convention is the first convention for the protection of a mountain region worldwide that is binding under international law (see: http://www. alpconv. org): for the first time a transnational mountain area has been considered in its geographical entity and continuity, a common territory facing common challenges.[5]

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[4] http://www.alpconv.org/en/convention/framework/default.html

[5] This is the "revolution" of the Alpine Convention. Today several other areas (Caucasus, Central Asia, Andes) look with interest at the experience of the Alpine Convention (see the homepage of the Alpine Convention). – One of the observers is the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). – Answering the intervention of the discussant one can say, that at the time when the treaty was concluded no earnest conflicts existed between the single countries. But there were common challenges to deal with such as climate change, air pollution, traffic, tourism a.s.o.

2) Structure of the Convention

- The Alpine Conference (it is political decision making body, the Ministers of the contracting parties, meetings are every two years)
- The Presidency (elected by the Alpine conference)
- Contracting parties (with national delegations)
- The Permanent Committee (executive body of the Alpine Conference, meetings are twice a year)
- Compliance Committee (control of committments and obligations)
- The Permanent Secretariat (located in Innsbruck/AT, with a branch office in Bozen/IT)
- Convention depository (Austria)
- Working Groups and Platforms (at present 11 bodies are active)
- Observers

3) Protocols and declarations with cultural aspects linked to the framework convention

The Member States should take specific measures in twelve thematic areas: Spatial Planning, Air Pollution, Soil Conservation, Water Management, Conservation of Nature and the Countryside, Mountain Farming, Mountain Forests, Tourism, Transport, Energy, and Waste Management, and what is of interest in our context, is the topic **Population and Culture**. There are ten protocols, and two declarations, which are annexed to the Framework Convention.

In chapter II of the protocol *Population and Culture* the cultural diversity and the tangable and intangible cultural heritage are addressed:

" ··· *Research, maintenance and development of the existing physical and non-physical cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. This applies in particular to traditional methods of landscape management and the architectural and artistic heritage, including traditional methods of working the fields, forestry, handcrafts and industrial production.*"

" ··· *Linguistic Diversity: 4. Recognition of the meaning and value of the toponomastic heritage (particularly place names and field names) in the Alpine area for cultural and historical reasons and also for the sake of their appreciation* ···." *It is recommended*

- *Projects to acquire and develop regional knowledge through toponomastic research*
- *Erection of information boards in towns and villages with the most important and significant place names".* (e.g. Kals am Großglockner: Audio-station with linguistic and cultural informations about the names of the districts, Alpine pastures, glaciers and of selected moutains of this valley)

3. Working groups and platforms

They are one of the most important organizational levels, eleven are currently active, the presidency of the working groups lies alternately in the hands of one of the partners.

In the past period from 2006–2014 the *Working Group UNESCO World Heritage* was active: This working group aimed at contributing transboundary applications to the UNESCO World Heritage List from the Alpine arch. One of the basic documents for this WG is the *Declaration on Population and Culture*.

The Study *Alpine Sites and the UNESCO World Heritage* gives insight into the results of this working group and gives advice to add Alpine sites and cultural landscapes[6] of outstanding universal value to the World Heritage list.

The WG UNESCO can be considered as a successful example of regional co–operation and contributes to the high knowledge standard about the world heritage in the Alps of European character (e.g. the common submission to UNESCO of the three states of Austria, Italy and France on various projects like the *Prehistoric Pile Dwellings, Alpi del Mare/Nature Park Sea Alps, National Park Mercantour*).[7]

In 2014 this working group ended its activities and was followed by the *Working Group on sustainable tourism*, which includes and persues also cultural, i.e. UNESCO aspects.

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[6] "Cultural Landscapes on the World Heritage List are properties in which the combined actions of Man and Nature are of outstanding universal value…" (Alpine sites and Cultural Landscapes p. 17).

[7] http://www.alpconv.org/de/organization/groups/past/WGUNESCO/default.html

This Working Group deals with the broad field of sustainable tourism and among others it concentrates on the valorization of natural and cultural heritage of the Alps by international instruments, which has also been the mandate of the Working Group UNESCO World Heritage.

Other working groups are:
- Working Group Transport
- Natural Hazards Platform - PLANALP
- Ecological Network Platform
- Water Management Platform in the Alps
- Large Carnivores, Wild Ungulates and Society Platform - WISO
- Working Group Macro-regional strategy for the Alps
- Mountain Farming Platform
- Working Group Mountain Forests
- **Working Group Sustainable Tourism**
- Ad hoc expert group for the preparation of Report on the state of the Alps (RSA) 6
- Ad hoc working group for the preparation of Multi Annual Programme (MAP) 2017-2022

1) Working group on sustainable tourism[8]

In chapter 14 of the Alpine Convention the European commission *"… defines sustainable tourism as tourism that is **economically and socially viable without detracting from the environment and local culture** which means a balanced approach to the three pillars of Sustainability[9] … respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their **built and living cultural heritage** and traditional values and **contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance** …."*

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[8] See: Report on the State of the Alps – ALPINE CONVENTION, Alpine Signals – Special Edition 4; http://www.alpconv.org/en/AlpineKnowledge/RSA/tourism/Documents/RSA4%20en%20WEB.pdf

[9] The three pillars comprise ecological, economic and social aspects (see Ralph Hansmann, Harald A. Mieg & Peter Frischknecht (2012): Principal sustainability components: Empirical analysis of synergies between the three pillars of sustainability, p. 10. International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology, 19:5, 451–459, http://www.mieg.ethz.ch/docs/SustainabilityComponents.pdf (contacted 7th August 2015).

The Mandate Proposal of the Working group Sustainable tourism for the period 2015–2016[10] contains in chapter 2: "*The valorisation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Alps ⋯*", which "*⋯ constitutes an important element in tackling the main challenge of tourism in the Alps, ⋯ harmonising economic interests with the needs of protecting nature and landscapes ⋯ communicating the natural and cultural values and integrating them into the tourism of the Alps ⋯ the actual contribution of designations (such as UNESCO World Heritage etc.) to local and regional tourist sites as well as the economic success and the environmental sustainability are also worth analysing.*"

The Report on the State of the Alps "Sustainable Tourism in the Alps"[11] from 2013 gives information on what is meant with sustainable tourism, which is "*⋯ based on promoting and valorising natural, historical, cultural and social resources ⋯ and respect for social and cultural traditions are only few of the challenges that need to be met.*" Further on "*⋯ Traditionally, the Alps were, and still are, a platform for innovation in the field of sustainable tourism products, which combine the responsible use of resources ⋯*" and *"Geotourism", like eco-tourism, promotes environmental and resource conservation based on geological specificities, but it also comprises a whole **concept of space, like history, culture, landscape, cuisine, arts, local flora and fauna, all characteristics that contribute to a "sense of place"***.

The influence of tourism on cultural development can be seen in the revitalization of cultural activities in the Alps on the local level. Due to a scientific study it became apparent that cultural activities are stronger to be seen in tourist resorts than in communities with less tourism. So, one can say that the attractions of the tourism in the Alps are based on the unique nature and culture.[12] The regional or local identities including nature and culture (cultural sites; handicraft, gastronomy, protected areas and agriculture) or traditions count as strengths of Alpine tourism ("authentic destinations") and indicate the way for the development of future tourism. "***Material and***

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[10] http://www.alpconv.org/en/organization/groups/tourism/Documents/Tourism-EN.pdf

[11] SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE ALPS Report on the State of the Alps ALPINE CONVENTION Alpine Signals – Special Edition 4 (2013) p. 14 and 15, http://www.alpconv.org/en/AlpineKnowledge/RSA/tourism/Documents/RSA4%20en%20WEB.pdf

[12] See footnote 10, p. 93.

immaterial cultural heritage create a specific environment and unique awareness of life. *Besides nature and landscapes this is a strong motivation for local residents to stay in their homeland …."*

One example for sustainable tourism is the Hohe Tauern National Park in Austria. The Länder Carinthia, Salzburg and Tyrol in 2009 developed a joint trade mark Hohe Tauern − The National Park Region, which lays weight on the improvement of regional identity, enhancement of cultural traditions, values and attitudes. All these factors have also an impact on the region's society and culture.

4. Achievements of the Alpine convention - some best practice examples of the working groups of the Alpine convention

1) Via Alpina[13]

There is a hiking trail, 5000 km long and stretches across 7 countries (Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Italy, France, and ending in Monaco). The intention of this programme was to support the preservation of the distinct cultures and the character of the Alpine mountain range.

2) Farm holidays

The **"Red Rooster"** association in South Tyrol (created by the Farmer's Union of South Tyrol in 2009): local farmers shall earn an extra income from their farm, by offering Farm Holidays in South Tyrol, thus to guarantee a sustainable development of South Tyrol's rural culture. It is a very successful programme and there is a growing demand for nature and culture holidays. Other countries like Austria followed this initiative.

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[13] www.via−alpina.org

3) Young academics award[14]

Young scientists receive support for study and research, every two years the best bachelor and master thesis on themes related to the Alpine Convention are presented.

5. Resumé

- The Alpine Convention proved to be a powerful means for the cooperation of 8 countries with 140 mill. people
- Mountain ranges are not more realized as borders but as a common heritage for transboundary communication and cooperation besides the different languages and cultures
- Common measures gave rise to a strengthening of local identities by revitalizing local cultures and traditions
- Culture and cultural heritage appears as engine for innovative tourism development regarding the culture of the others
- Bordering countries have a vast cultural potential (see the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region [EUSALP]) and their incorporation leads to fruitful innovations
- The Alpine Mountains are a co-operative area, including the neighbouring countries with the focus on economic, social and ecological developments
- The Alpine Convention and the EUSALP programme can give advice to other regions on the globe, be it treating similar issues[15], or providing some incentives for a model of cooperations in a broader sense, e.g. on the rich transboundary cultural issues in the East-Asian region.

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[14] www.alpineconv.org

[15] E.g. to the 2nd Euro-Asian Mountain Resorts Conference, organized by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and Ulsan Metropolitan City with support of the Government of the Republic of Korea (14 - 16 October 2015) with the title "Paving the Way for a Bright Future for Mountain Destinations" (which discusses the recent challenges and promotes a platform for the exchange of ideas and projects).