

Alpine tourism of the future – concentration on a few areas, or overnight stays in the remotest valley

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The success story of tourism in the Alps also has to do with their position right outside the door of some huge and dynamic economic zones. The Alps are simultaneously at Europe's heart and at its periphery. Because of the opening for traffic begun around 100 years ago, including the farthest remote valleys, because of a lodging infrastructure up to the highest peak regions, numerous technical climbing aids, and last but not least the hospitality of the natives, the Alps are today one of the oldest, most developed, most successful and largest vacation regions in the world.

In 2008, all eight Alpine countries together had 375,500,000 paid overnight stays, which was 16.3% of all the overnight stays in the entire 27 EU countries. According to the Innsbruck Management Center, the lion's share goes to the Austrian Alps (29%), the Italian Alps (28 %), and the French Alps (24%). The highest number of overnight stays is in the Rhone Alpes, 47,700,000, followed by the Tyrol with 43,800,000 and South Tyrol with 27,700,000 overnight stays.

"Work where others go on holiday"

The fact that today, Alpine inhabitants can still live and work with their families in the remotest Alpine valleys is often due to tourism. Tourism secures decentralised sufficient means to earn a living, including through trade and handicrafts. It creates leisure facilities and thus quality of life for guests and natives alike. Tourism also makes the place attractive for business and research.

Tourism enterprises are connected with particular places. Outsourcing is not possible. Thus, besides trade, tourism has verifiably contributed to overcoming the years of crisis. And Alpine tourism has enormous potential for the future.

The future and the opportunities of Alpine tourism

"Small, rich, secure, cool" is the way the Swiss futurologist David Bosshart concisely described it on the occasion of the Alps in Innsbruck. Today's globalised world is regarded as large, poor, insecure and hot. The Alps offer alternatives to these global developments, making them more attractive and more precious than ever before. The Alpine worlds have long been nostalgic places, idyllic and intimate, providing orientation and guidance.

Actively meeting challenges in Alpine tourism together

At the same time, Alpine tourism is facing special challenges. Today, the Alps are exposed to competition as never before. Spending a week skiing in the Alps during the mid-February main season now competes with a five-star educational tour to Turkey for less than €180 per week, flights included. Cruises and long-distance journeys at bargain prices as well as the complete cost transparency provided by the Internet now put pressure on prices that were calculated for high capacities in boom times. Climate change, a stealthy loss of the tourists' affinity to skiing and winter, the demographic development and questions of mobility require transregional answers and cooperations. Alpine tourism is at a high degree of development and maturity, running the risk of stagnating.

theAlps – Lobbying platform for Alpine tourism

Against a background of great possibilities as well as challenges, a lobbying platform called theAlps was created, initiated by Tyrol. This platform is intended to provide an international stage to Alpine tourism beyond the existing initiatives. It is intended to support lobbying, the exchange of opinions, the collaborative confrontation of problems, and the development of solutions. It is also intended to combine supply and demand in an innovative new sales platform beginning in 2011. When all fourteen ministers of tourism of the Alpine countries met for the first time to sign the Innsbruck Manifesto on Cooperation in Alpine Tourism Policy on September 13, 2010, they documented their solidarity in a political way. The Alpine Convention is explicitly acknowledged in the Manifesto as an important basis for a sustainable development in tourism.

Peripheral Alpine regions and tourism

The disparities concerning regional development arise from the topography of the Alps itself. Only 12% of Tyrol's total area is usable for permanent settlement. Tyrol is largely an Alpine habitat and an Alpine economic zone. The overlapping of recreational area, habitat and economic zone for tourists and natives is one of the most conspicuous features of Alpine tourism. In this regard, Tyrol's definition of tourism doesn't mean giant, artificially-created resorts, financed by foreign investors, but structures developed by native enterprises and their families over decades, forming the basis for their lives.

Regional policies are successful if the people remain

Tyrol has nothing but the Alpine habitat and economic zone, and thus finds itself in a situation completely different from those of regions that only have marginal mountain areas. Tyrol therefore deliberately practices a comprehensive tourism. The natives' attachment to their homeland and their iron will not to emigrate but to build their future *there* is a trait of a mentality that has always been prominent in Tyrol. To support this, tourism has been offering absolutely essential economic perspectives. Tyrol's balance of migration confirms this development. Regional policies have succeeded in slowing down or even reversing the tendency to emigrate that was seen from 1961 to 1981. During the 1981-2006 periods, some peripheral Tyrolean Alpine valleys and tourism regions even became areas of immigration.¹ Through the use of comprehensive, integrated regional tourism policies, this positive development is expected to continue.

¹ F. Rauter, Instrumente und Erfolgsfaktoren der Regionalpolitik, Office of the Tyrolean Federal State Government, 2008