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Added value of the membership in a transnational alpine network for sustainable urban and regional development by example of the association 'Alpine Town of the Year'

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ABSTRACT / ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In recent years, mountainous regions and other ecoregional entities have increasingly been recognized as transnational, connected areas. This is particularly the case for the alpine region, which acts as a role model in this regard. An important aspect in this comes to pan-Alpine networks, which play an important part in the making of the region. This is described as a two-fold impetus, with both bottom-up and top-down impulses. The assembly of pan-alpine networks, most of which are connected to CIPRA, play an important part in connecting both strands.

The association in question in this thesis, Alpine Town of the Year (AtY), is an example of such networks. In the face of the climate crisis, as well as other challenges of the region, it is argued that the importance of these networks is ever-increasing. The factors, as to how networks can successfully contribute to the sustainable development of the region is the overarching question of this work, by the example of AtY. Conceptually, the principles of network theory, in particular Social Network Theory, are used, while empirically, AtY is investigated using qualitative methodology.

It is found that AtY plays a small, but significant role within sustainable regional development of the Alps. However, certain crucial parameters that determine the effectiveness of the networks are found. To further improve their output, the network needs to work on both its internal and external structure, as well as refine its thematic focus. From the overall insights of the work, pivotal recommendations for transnational city networks are derived.

Seit einigen Jahren werden Bergregionen und andere ökoregionale Einheiten zunehmend als transnational-verbundene Regionen angesehen. Das ist speziell im Alpenraum der Fall, welcher als Pionierregion in diesem Zusammenhang gilt. Ein wichtiger Teil wird hierbei transnationalen Netzwerken zu Teil, welche eine wichtige Rolle in der Entstehung der zusammenhängenden Region spielen. Dies wird als zwei-seitiger Antrieb beschrieben, einerseits durch bottom-up, wie auch durch top-down Initiativen. Die Assemblage pan-alpiner Netzwerke, die meisten in Verbindung mit CIPRA, stellen den zentralen Verbindungspunkt dieser beiden Stränge dar.

Der Verein, welcher in dieser Arbeit untersucht wird, Alpenstadt des Jahres (AdJ), gehört zu diesen. Angesichts der Klimakrise, wie auch weiteren Herausforderungen der Region, wird argumentiert, dass diese Netzwerke zunehmend an Bedeutung gewinnen. Die Faktoren, wie Netzwerke, am Beispiel von AdJ, zur nachhaltigen Entwicklung der Alpen beitragen können, ist die übergeordnete Fragestellung dieser Thesis. Konzeptionell wird auf Netzwerktheorie, insbesondere Soziale Netzwerktheorie, zurückgegriffen, während auf empirischer Seite AdJ qualitativ untersucht wird.

Es zeigt sich, dass AdJ eine kleine, aber bedeutende Rolle in der nachhaltigen Entwicklung der Alpenregion spielt. Basierend auf den Erkenntnissen aus der Netzwerktheorie zeigen sich aber bestimmte Faktoren, welche die Effektivität des Netzwerkes beeinflussen. AdJ muss demnach weiter an seiner internen und externen Struktur, wie auch seinem thematischen Fokus arbeiten. Abschließend werden Handlungsempfehlungen für transnational-aktive Städtenetzwerke wie AdJ abgeleitet.

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Data for base maps, including relief, administrative divisions and municipalities are, if not marked otherwise, accessed from Eurostat GISCO (Geographic Information System of the Commission), which can be accessed via: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/gisco> (02.09.2022).

ABBREVIATIONS:

AC	Alpine Conference
AcT	Action Theory
AiA	Alliance in the Alps
AlpCon	Alpine Convention
ANT	Actor-Network Theory
ARGE; ARGE Alp	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenländer
AT	Alpine Town of the Year <i>as in</i> the title, the individual towns
AtY	Alpine Town of the Year <i>as in</i> the association
CIPRA	Commission Internationale pour la Protection des Alpes
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESPON	European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion
EU	European Union
EUAS	Alpine Space Program
EUSALP	European Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSTR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
FFF	Fridays For Future
GaYa	Governance and Youth in the Alps (AtY-Project)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IAS	Interreg Alpine Space
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO, NG-	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIT	Pragmatist-Interactionist Theories
RS	Relational Sociology
SC	Social Capital
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNO, UN	United Nations Organization
WECD	Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform
YSAM	Youth Shaping Alpine Municipalities (AtY-Project)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Alps are one of the defining features of European landscape, including some of the largest continuous unspoilt natural areas in Europe, and have been inhabited for millennia. Its manifold landscape, both physically and culturally, is fascinating, as much as it offers many different challenges for its inhabitants. The area is defined by a complex interplay of different uses and demands, ranging from settlement area, to tourism, to its role as a valuable nature reserve.

The biggest challenges the region is facing to date include the demographic development of the region as well as the climate crisis, which has been proven to affect the Alps over-proportionally. The change in population distribution offers some serious issues for both the development of towns and cities as well as remote areas, which experience depopulation. Alpine cities are increasingly under pressure, while at the same time, urban development has to be handled differently in such mountainous regions. Combining this with, on the one hand, the physical layout of the Alps, which is very volatile to begin with, but even more challenging because of the impacts of the climate crisis, and, on the other hand, the complex structure of cultural and built heritage, the need for comprehensive and forward-looking spatial planning is apparent.

In this regard, pan-Alpine networks have proven to be a useful tool to support the local actors in the implementation of effective measures, for example when it comes to effectuate the Alpine Convention (AlpCon) on citizen-level. The network researched in detail in this work, Alpine Town of the Year (AtY), is one of the associations within the assemblage of pan-Alpine organisations.

In recent years, an increase of transnational initiatives has been seen in many parts of Europe, including mountainous regions like the Alps, driven partly by the efforts of the European Union. These transnational networks are *"conceived to achieve a better spatial fit between real-life problems that transcend national borders, and existing institutional arrangements that are restricted by such borders"* (DÜHR 2018: 543). Further, they provide *"more homogeneous groupings of nations and regions than at the level of a complex EU [...]"* (IBID 2018: 543). Particularly in the Alpine region, transnational institutionalization is increasingly taking place. The first step in the making of the Alpine Region was the formulation of the Alpine Convention in 1991, which was signed by Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Monaco and the European Union. This treaty is the most important legal means for sustainable development in the region, as it consists of legally binding protocols on specific subjects. This, and the introduction of EU programs, such as INTERREG ALPINE SPACE or EUSALP, has led to the Alps being increasingly recognised as one connected region.

Transnational Networks *"are organisations that facilitate information exchange, cooperation and lobbying activities of cities from different countries — independent of the national level"* (NIEDERHAFNER 2013: 377). While urban networks in general *"exist to speed the transfer of goods, people and ideas"* (GLAESER et al. 2016: 7), transnational urban networks are particularly common when it comes to dealing with issues related to sustainability and climate crisis adaption. For the Alpine Region, MARZELLI and LINTZMEYER (2015: 352) state that *"more transnational coordination is desirable in many policy fields"*.

One of the decisive organisations in the alps is CIPRA (*Commission Internationale pour la Protection des Alpes*), which was not only the initiator of the Alpine Convention, but also today still is the head institution of many Alpine collaborations including AtY. The origin of CIPRA, and with it the AlpCon, goes back to the beforementioned interplay between usage and protection of the given land, as CIPRA (2018) states: “[...] *equal attention [is] afforded to the twin aspects of protection and use*”. Similarly, AtY commits a “*special responsibility for the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage, and endeavours to ensure that it is developed in a sustainable way*” (AtY 2022a). The term sustainability is the most important connecting point for many Alpine networks including both EU- and AlpCon related institutions.

“Sustainability” connects by definition social, economic and environmental aspects (FARLEY and SMITH 2020: 3; KOCH and KRELLENBERG 2021: 5). Originating from the need to work foresightful in forestry, the term has in the recent centuries found its way into the broader public, being the main principle in many research and development papers of various disciplines. Today, the term has been defined by various authors and institutions in hundreds of different forms, which makes it impossible to come up with a universal definition. However, the term usually encompasses economic, ecologic, and social aspects in a future-orientated and intergenerationally just way. Recently, the discussion has expanded to calling into question the equality of the three aspects, as well as the paradigm of “*sustainable growth*”. The term may therefore be on the brink of a significant change in denotation.

Looking at existing literature, the Alps as a region have been subject to research for many centuries. While much of the work focuses on the physical appearance and processes, human geography and regional development aspects have been researched as well. Important works on the general regional development of the Alps have been provided, for example, by MESSERLI (2015), MATHIEU (2015), BALSIGER (2016), BÄTZING (2015), PERLIK (2019)) or CARRER et al. (2020), with various organisations working in the Alps, such as CIPRA, the INTERREG ALPINE SPACE PROGRAM, ALPARC and many others also providing a wide range of research, reports and monitoring. While there has been some research regarding Alpine networks, as by BEHRINGER (2003), DEBARBIEUX et al. (2015), DEL BIAGGIO (2016; 2015; 2011; 2010; 2009) or STAUDIGL (2013), the organization AtY has only sparsely been investigated. Most recently by previous diploma theses, such as BUCHL (2010) and BAUMGARTNER (2010). However, most literature is fairly out of date (see KÜBLER 1998; NEUGEBAUER 1998; PERLIK 1998).

This thesis is based on the concept of network theory, which forms the foundation for the subsequent discussion. Network theory provides a general basis for understanding network-like structures, which follow the same fundamental principles in any environment. While Social Science has an own set of theories on networks, Policy Network Analysis is a subfield of these, which deals specifically with networks of actors relevant to governance, as is the case in this study.

In the Alpine region, as a specifically multi-national area with eight countries and even more regions being part of it, transnational networks are of particular importance. This is supported by the fact that the region looks back on a long history of, on the one hand, regional independence, and, on the other hand, trans-border cooperation. Consequently, many different trans-national Alpine networks exist.

While both the fact that the Alps face the need to develop more sustainably, especially in spatial aspects, and the importance of transnational networks in the area is apparent, the question to what extent the individual members actually profit from these networks in terms of spatial development remains. Taking into account the increasing threat of the climate crisis, developing strategies to speed and improve sustainable developments is therefore crucial.

This practical relevance combines well with my personal interests as a researcher, which encompass both enthusiasm for the Alpine region, as being a resident of it myself, as well as my compassion for finding seminal solutions for future urban and regional development.

The 25-year anniversary of the Organisation Alpine Town of the Year therefore provides a fitting occasion to analyse the efficacy of the work, the Organisation has done, in terms of sustainable urban and regional development in the Alpine region. This insight is subsequently transferred to the broader perspective of pan-Alpine networks in general.

Form the background provided above, the following three main Research questions are derived:

- 1) *Which are the decisive factors for networks such as AtY to be able to successfully contribute to the sustainable urban and regional development of its members?*
- 2) *What is the added value for its members in terms of sustainable urban and regional development?*
- 3) *Which recommendations and strategies for AtY and comparable associations can be derived from the above?*

Methodologically, the work includes both a theoretical framework on the topics described above, as well as a case study part, which focuses on specific towns that are part of the network AtY. Foundation of the work is a profound literature research, including both scientific literature and documents and reports from the researched institutions and associations (CH. 2). This part is divided into four sub-sections, firstly investigating the specific preconditions of the Alpine region (2.1; 2.2; 2.3), then looking at the actors who shape the network structure of the area (2.4), before looking at networks from the perspective of network theory in general and particularly from Social Science (2.5). CH. 3 describes the methodological approach of the empirical part in detail, before the results of this are presented in CH. 4. Subsequently, CH. 5 combines both strands of the thesis to discuss concrete answers to the three research questions.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Alpine space

2.1.1 Spatial extent

The Alpine region is an incredibly diverse and complex landscape. Being right in the middle of Europe, several countries and regions are part of it. However, the exact demarcation of what the Alps are, varies according to different sources. Of course, for the matter of this thesis, at first a definition of the space, the Alps encompass, needs to be drawn.

The renowned German Alpine researcher WERNER BÄTZING (2015) describes three ways of demarcations for mountainous regions, in this case the Alps:

1. Narrow demarcation: the Alps only encompass the high-mountainous areas, but not the bordering valleys. From a physical science perspective, this means, only those areas, where high-mountain physical processes are happening. Also, in the tourism industry, this definition is frequently used, as the Alps are seen only as the areas above roughly 1000m meters elevation, where mountain-specific sports and events are possible. This definition divides the Alps into a large number of small individual batches of land.
2. Medium demarcation: In addition to the above, also inner-Alpine valleys and basins are counted towards the area. Politically, this means that, as opposed to the narrow distinction, municipalities are not intersected by this boundary. Since many larger Alpine settlements are situated in deep valleys or on the edge of the mountains, this demarcation holds a lot more inhabitants.
3. Broad demarcation: the long-range impact of a mountain chain is also considered, which reaches far beyond the medium demarcation. For the Alpine region, BÄTZING names the rivers Po, Rhône, Rhine, and Danube as the outermost boundaries.

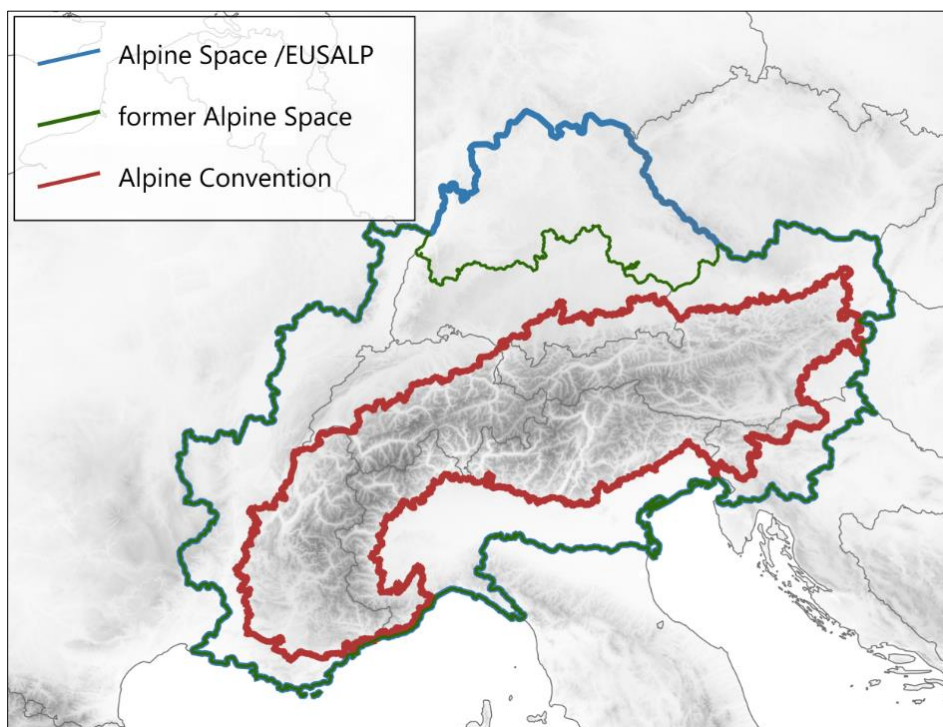


Figure 1:
Comparison of the demarcations of the current Alpine Space Programme, corresponding to the EUSALP perimeter (blue), the EU Alpine Space Program demarcation until 2020 (green) and the Alpine Convention (red).

In line with the above, many of the institutions, which operate within the region, have developed their own demarcations, using different approaches. While the Alpine Convention (AlpCon) uses the medium approach (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022a), the EU ALPINE SPACE PROGRAM (EUAS) and the EU EUSALP encompass much larger areas, going with the broad demarcation (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2022; INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2022a).

After the introduction of the EUSALP program, the EUAS perimeter was adjusted according to it, which is why EUSALP and EUAS encompass the same area now. This change includes large parts of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, which were missing before (INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2022b). FIG. 1 shows the differences between the EU and AlpCon approaches. Most notably, the broad demarcation of the Alpine Space Program includes many of the large cities that are situated on the edge of the Alps as well, such as Munich, Vienna, or Milan, which result in a much larger population. While the AlpCon claims to include more than 14mio people (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022b), the EUAS has over 80mio inhabitant (INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2022). Interestingly, the only region that is part of the Convention, but not the EUAS is the country of Monaco, which was one of the founding members of the AlpCon (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022b). Going with the definition of the AlpCon, the Alps are home to 14.2 million people, living on an area of 190 717 km², spanning over eight countries: Austria (28.7%), France (21.4%), Germany (5.8%), Italy (27.2%), Liechtenstein (0.08%), Monaco (0.001%), Slovenia (3.6%), and Switzerland (13.2%) (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022b; ALPINE CONVENTION 2018), in more than 5000 municipalities (ALPINE CONVENTION 2018; ALPINE CONVENTION 2016). The association CIPRA also uses the AlpCon definition, although excluding Monaco (CIPRA 2018).

BÄTZING (2015a) considers the medium demarcation as the most sensible one, being not too large but still forming one continuous area. For the matter of this thesis, also a medium demarcation is used, namely the one from the AlpCon, which is also the most common and widely accepted definition in the literature. However, it has to be said that this definition is not without criticism. Italian Alpine researcher FABRICIO BARTALETTI (2011) points out that this definition goes back to individual demarcations of each of the member states, which results in an inconsistent result (BÄTZING and CHILLA 2014). For this matter, BARTALETTI (2011) has developed his own definition, which differs slightly from the Alpine Convention one.

2.1.2 Socio-spatial characteristics

The Alps are characterized by a long history of cultivation of a physically demanding landscape. The area has been inhabited since prehistoric times and has since seen various phases of development. While in the literature for example BÄTZING (2015a); DENZEL et al. (2017); MATHIEU (2015); VESTER and MATHIEU (2009) cover the history of the Alps in great detail, in the following only a brief overview on the topic is given.

Always having been shaped by rough physical conditions, the Alps are, as BÄTZING (2015a) points out, not to be seen as a underdeveloped region, as they have a long tradition of cultural achievement. He describes the region as a *“periphery in the centre of Europe”* (IBID 2015: 25). Especially the image of an *“autarkic self-sufficient”* economy is outdated, as there has always been forms of Alpine capitalism, which basically follow the same rules as other forms of capitalism (IMBODEN 2017).

Geomorphologically, the Alps are the highest and roughest mountain range in central Europe, which means, its cultivation comes with major challenges. Therefore, settlement has always concentrated in low valleys and on south-facing slopes. The special natural preconditions further resulted in Alp-specific solutions such as *Transhumance*, a specific type of pastoral agriculture, which is still used today (BÄTZING 2015a). The agriculture used to be heavily centred on a valley-mountain-relationship, with both areas profiting mutually from their cooperation (EGLI 2014).

However, besides agriculture, the region also offers a wide range of natural resources, such as copper or iron, as well as very specified industries such as textiles, ceramics and luxury products like watches (DENZEL et al. 2017). In addition, trade has always played a major role in the area. Their central position in-between southern and central-northern Europe makes the Alps an important trade route. While the Alps have been inhabited prior to the roman times, their culture of trade and urban life, which included the development of paved roads, played an important role in their development (BÄTZING 2015a; DENZEL et al. 2017).

After the decline of the roman empire, the Alpine region had experienced a significant loss of population, which only reversed in high medieval times, when trade once again gained significance, with the Alps being one of the main European trade routes. During this time, many Alpine cities were founded (DENZEL et al. 2017). BÄTZING (2015a) divides the subsequent (re-)settlement of the Alps generally in two categories, "*Altsiedlungsfläche*" (areas that have continuously been inhabited) and "*Jungsiedlungsfläche*" (which have been re-settled). The two areas, the prior mainly being situated in the western and southern Alps, the latter in the northern and eastern Alps, vary significantly in their culture and economy, which nowadays can still be seen in the physical layout of the settlements (e.g. the stretched-out layout of Passy, France). Besides this division, DENZEL et al. (2017: 11-17) further describes a total of seven factors, which play a major role in the development of settlements and trade in the respective regions, which include the availability of markets, infrastructure, and the structure of the respective economy.

After the "*golden age of the Alps*" (DENZEL et al. 2017: 3), which lasted roughly until the 15. Century, another period of population declines set in, possibly due to the plague (14th century) or changes in the society and the discovery of new trade routes. ROHR (2017) also describes a correlation between rise- and decline-periods and climate phases, such as the *high-medieval-optimum* (1000-1300) and the *little ice age* (1300-1850), which is supported by the assumption that changes in climate have a relatively greater impact on mountainous areas.

Following the industrial revolution, the Alpine region participated in the general development towards a industrialised economy, however, changes have been much slower (BÄTZING 2015a). While certain areas managed to achieve an economical boost, such as the Swiss "*Berner Oberland*", where local farmers were able to earn small fortunes with their cheese economy, generally the amount of poor families rose, following the general European trend (DENZEL et al. 2017). During this time, the traditionally equal economical interplay between valley and mountains shifted increasingly towards an uneven development of the two, as more remote areas experienced a major disadvantage in the changing economic structures. This trend has led to a vast depopulation of certain remote areas (alongside other factors), such as the Swiss *Wallis* and *Tessin* and large parts of the Austrian Alps, especially *Styria*, which still holds on today (BÄTZING et al. 1994; EGLI 2014; ELMi et al. 2018).

2.1.3 Demographic characteristics

The Alpine region today is no longer an area of out-migration, the trend has been reversed in the last centuries (ČEDE et al. 2018). While the region therefore has an overall positive migration-balance, there are great differences between its sub-regions. A comprehensive report on the demographic state of the Alps has been published by the AlpCon in 2018 (ELMI et al. 2018). The report shows that the population is naturally generally higher in lower regions, broad valleys, and regions closer to the Alpine border (see FIG. 2: B). Apart from the agglomerations on the Border of the perimeter, the largest settlements can be found within the *Inn*, *Adige* and *Rhine* Valleys as well as the basins around Villach and Grenoble. While the biggest city within the Alpine Convention Perimeter is Grenoble (160.000, 2019)¹, the largest agglomerations are found around Grenoble (494.000), Como-Cantù (363.000) and Salzburg (327.000), which is only partly within the perimeter (BARTALETTI 2011) (see also: FIG. 3).

In terms of population change, the situation is similar, as more remote areas tend to experience depopulation. However, the situation varies significantly between the regions, with large parts of the eastern Austrian and Italian Alps experiencing population decline, while French, Tyrolian and German Alps experience a rather positive balance (FIG. 2: A). The report interprets the change as a *"indicator for economic prosperity or structural weakness in the regions"* (ELMI et al. 2018: 16). Closely correlated with the population change trends is the trend of resident population aging, which follows roughly the same spatial patterns (ELMI et al. 2018: 15).

While the report draws a comprehensive picture of the situation in the Alps as a whole, some of the data, especially when it comes to population changes, only go as far as 2010 and are therefore fairly outdated. While no newer report on the Alpine arch as a whole exists, recent studies have shown a recent reverse effect of counter-urbanisation, which takes part in various rural regions of the Alps. ČEDE et al. (2018) connects this to the *"rediscovery and revaluation of rural areas"* (ČEDE et al. 2018: 637).

This migration, which falls under the general term of so called *"amenity migration"* (STEINICKE et al. 2012: 330), is more significant in the French Alps, where it has started in the 1980s already (LÖFFLER et al. 2014; STEINICKE et al. 2012). STEINICKE et al. (2012) shows that it is now spreading to the Italian Friulian Alps, which have priorly been a region of major depopulation, as well. While these areas show an overall decline in the period between 1980-2010 (FIG. 2: A), large parts have experienced a reversal of the trend since 1991 (STEINICKE et al. 2012).

Concerning the eastern Austrian Alps, however, ČEDE et al. (2018) has investigated that this phenomenon does not apply to the same extent, as large population decrease can still be observed. He sees the specific land-ownership-structures, such as the perseverance of large estates and the unaltered dominance of forestry as the main reasons for this. Looking at newest data for the region of eastern Austria, however, (STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2022; STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2021; STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2020), again a shift in demographic patterns can be observed even in eastern Austria, as large parts of the Alpine regions of Styria have shifted from decrease in 2019 and 2020 to an increase in population in 2021. This data point may, however, not be representative and needs further investigation.

¹ <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6005800?geo=COM-38185>

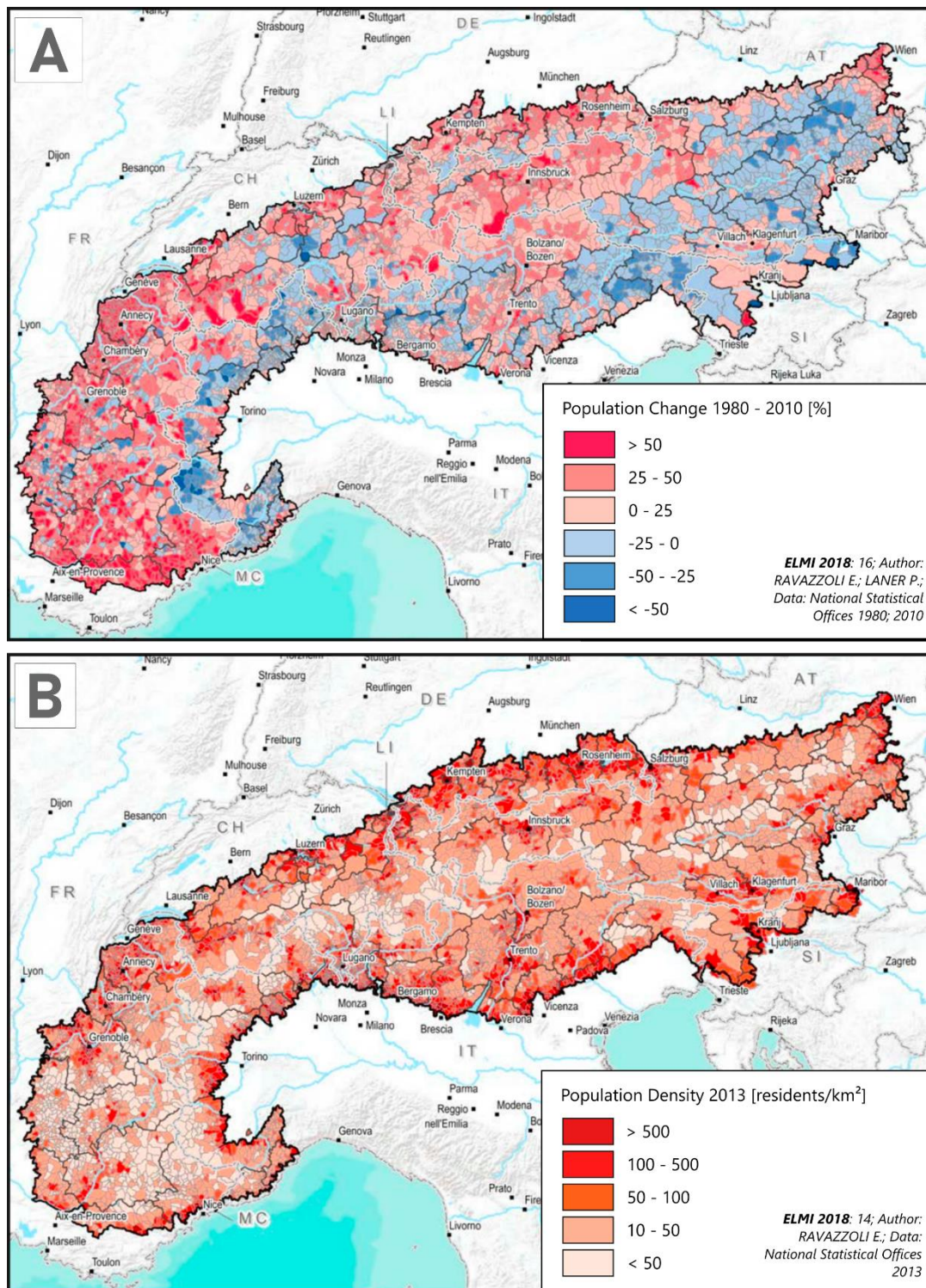


Figure 2: Population change Alpine Perimeter 1990-2010 (A); Population density Alpine Perimeter (B); (ELMI 2018: 14 (A), 16 (B), edited)

Taking all this together, it can be said that no general trend of demographic development for the rural and remote areas of the Alps can be derived, as the circumstances vary significantly. However, the assumption of depopulation of remote and rural settlements in general can definitely be dismissed.

Undisputed is, however, the trend of urbanisation, which takes part in almost all the larger settlements in the Alpine region (BARTALETTI 2014; BÄTZING 2015a; CIPRA 2018; PIA 2019), with

the exception of a number of towns that were dependent on old industries, such as *Eisenerz*, *Leoben* (Austria, Styria) or *Modane* (France, Alps-Côte-d'Azur; BARTALETTI 2014). Having defined a set of characteristics of urban sprawl in the Alpine region, BARTALETTI (2014) categorised the following five scenarios, where urbanisation has particularly taken place:

- 1) Enlargement of non-Alpine cities into Alpine territory, such as Vienna, Milan, Turin.
- 2) Suburbanisation of Alpine Cities in large basins, such as Villach, Maribor.
- 3) Ribbon-like growth along valleys, like the Alpine Rhine Valley, the Inn Valley.
- 4) Development of touristic hotspots, such as Chur, Davos, St. Moritz.
- 5) Development of towns with central importance, such as the respective regional capitals.

BARTALETTI (2014; 2011) further stresses the importance of functioning urban regions for the development of the Alps as a whole, as he argues that *"if the quality of living [...] is to be improved, it is indispensable to specifically strengthen the central-importance function of the Alpine towns [...]. However, this has to be accompanied by measures of nature preservation and minimalization of land consumption"* (BARTALETTI 2014: 179).

The urbanisation of the Alps does not mean though, as BÄTZING (2015a) points out, that the Alpine cities accomplished the same rate of urbanisation as other areas in Europe. Looking at ESPONs FUAs (*Functional Urban Areas*), for example, none of the highest level areas, so called MEGAs (Metropolitan European Growth Areas) lie within the Alpine convention perimeter, while several of them lie right on the border of it (BÄTZING 2015b: 216). FIG. 3 shows a depiction of FUAs, based on the data of the ESPON FUIRORE Project 2016², where the Alpine arch is clearly visible as the lack of FUAs, with the few that exist not being of the highest level. However, highest-level areas such as Milan, Munich, Vienna and Lyon lie right on the edge of the perimeter (see also: GLOERSEN et al. 2013).

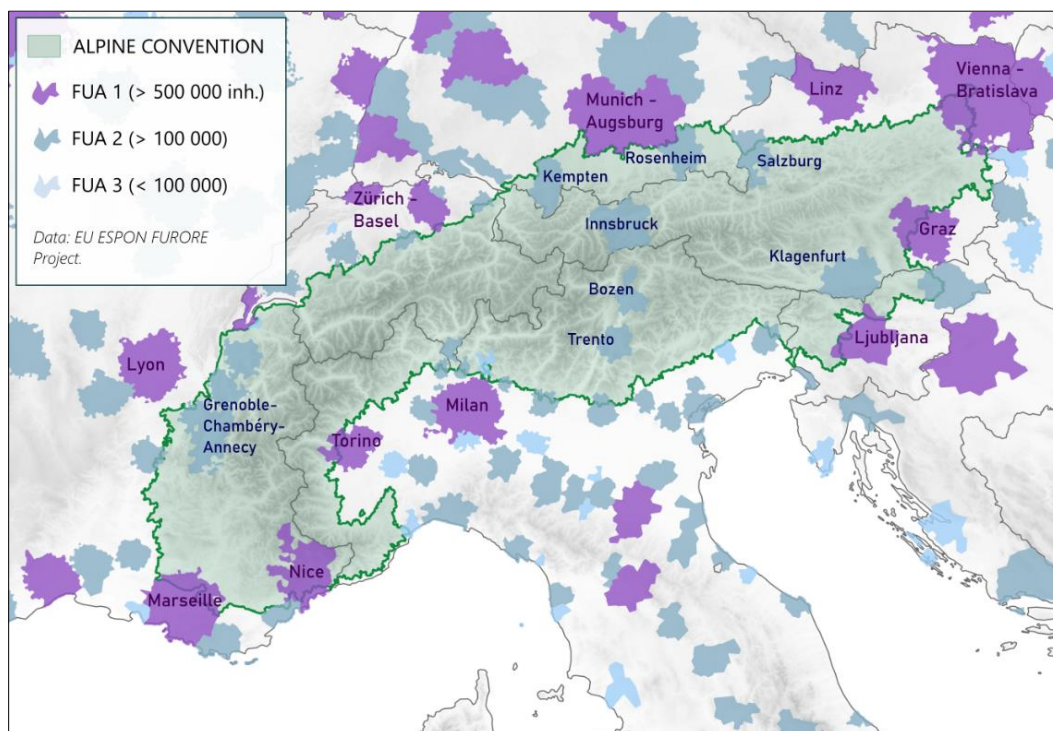


Figure 3: Functional Urban Areas (FUA), categorised by size, in the Alpine Region.

² <https://fuore.espon.eu/>

Linguistically, the Alpine space is dominated by the four languages German, Italian, French and Slovenian, while several minor languages such as Romance, Friulian or Ladin are spoken as well. Additionally, the traditional Alpine languages differ in their Manifestation, as various dialect of, for example in the German language, the Bavarian, Swiss or Tyrolian dialect, exist (CIPRA 2018). While the languages are, of course, primarily spoken within the respective countries, there are some overlaps, such as the German dialect of Tyrolian being spoken in Italian South Tyrol, the French minority in the Aosta Valley in Italy, Slovenian minorities in Austrian Carinthia and many more, not to speak of the linguistic diversity of Switzerland. This linguistic pluralism is described as one of the defining characteristics of the Alpine identity and uniqueness, with many projects and initiatives from the side of the AlpCon aiming to protect near-extinct minority languages (ALPINE CONVENTION 2016; CIPRA 2018). DEL BIAGGIO (2016a: 135) points out this controversy, as *"the natural and socio-cultural elements that characterize the Alps are exactly the same ones upon which the Alpine unity is built"*.

2.1.4 Economic characteristics

The Alpine region has always had to face significant challenges when it comes to use the land for economic purposes. The limited availability of flat space and the reduced accessibility of many areas forced the inhabitants to come up with creative and adaptive solutions. While for the most part of its history, the region has relied mostly on agriculture and subsistence, with trade and handicraft player a role as well, these industries now play only a minor role (see CH. 2.1.2; BÄTZING 2015).

This is, unlike other regions of Europe, is less due to the industrial revolution, but rather the increasing importance of tourism and subsequently service industries at the beginning of the 20th century (CARRER et al. 2020; STAUDIGL 2013). One of the decisive steps in this development was the replacement of traditional trade routes (e.g. *"Saumverkehr"*) through modern ways of transportation, most importantly the railway, which not the least led to a boom of the tourism industry (PERLIK 2019b).

In the face of the industrial revolution, due to innovations like the steam engine, production became much more effective, which lead to the development that only highly specialized or highly intensified use of land can be sustained, both of which come with problems for the environment (BÄTZING 2015a). As mentioned above, the Alps did not take part in the Industrialisation of Europe at first, for which BÄTZING (2015a: 133,134) sees four main reasons:

- 1) Resources: The Alps do not hold natural resources in sufficient numbers.
- 2) Accessibility: the relief of the Alps makes a simple accession of the area impossible.
- 3) Politics: the regions of the Alps were generally divided into small entities, which makes a wholesome development if the area impossible.
- 4) Mentality: the local society remained sceptical towards the new "capitalist" work-ethic, which spread in areas surrounding the Alps.

After the region had originally not taken part in the industrialisation, three developments nevertheless led to the gradual introduction of it, them being: (1) Napoleon, who destroyed the traditional small-scale political entities, when he conquered much of the region; (2) the suspension of manorialism between 1789 (France) and 1848 (Habsburg empire), which changed the organisation of society and economy completely and (3) the railway and the subsequent

introduction of tourism (BÄTZING 2015a: 135–137). Around the year 1880, industrialisation began to directly invade the Alpine region and immediately started change it, by, for example, gradually taking over or replacing traditional Alpine industries (BÄTZING 2015a).

As CARRER et al. (2020) argues, only the massive changes caused by the industrialisation in the late 19th century caused the Alps to be seen as an economically marinated area with depopulation and poverty. He suggests that *“during the historic period, Alpine communities were not isolated entities, but were subject to the same social, economic, and political processes as rural communities in the plains, particularly over the last three centuries when growing intensity of land exploitation along with increasing expansion of markets were significantly changing rural communities, as was evident in the landscape.”* (CARRER et al. 2020: 69,70). Following this argument, only the introduction of the industrialised capitalist economics lead to the Alps becoming a peripheral region which struggles to keep up with the rest of Europe. While BÄTZING (2015a) generally agrees with some of these points, he, on the other hand, also points out that the inventions also lead to economic upgrading in many areas too, especially those that profited from the newly built railway.

Following the big tourism boom in the 1950s and 1960s, which was caused by motorization, higher wages and more free time (PERLIK 2019b; SIEGRIST 2014), the Alps became one of the mass tourist destinations of Europe, which subsequently changed the Alps' economy completely. Besides tourism, the most important industries in the Alps nowadays are, of course, all forms of service industries, often related to the tourism industry, energy and water economy, specialized industries and agriculture and forestry (BÄTZING 2015a; BÄTZING and CHILLA 2014; MEGERLE 2018). Today, traditional industry is mainly situated along the easily accessible valleys, such as the Inn, the Adige or the Rhine Valley and around the major Alpine agglomerations, such as Grenoble, Innsbruck and Villach.

Especially energy, most importantly the hydro-energy industry, is emphasized as one of the possible future scenarios of the Alps by BÄTZING (2015a; 2015b; CH. 2.2.6), as the Alps are, on the one hand, centrally located in Europe and are, on the other hand, an important reservoir of water, as the precipitation is significantly higher than in the surrounding areas.

More than agriculture and industries though, tourism plays a major role in the Alps today. Following the great tourism boom of the 20th century, the attitude towards tourism in the Alps has now changed. On the one hand, economic stagnation, due to high prices, global competition and outdated structures, on the other hand, the increasing influence of movements towards a more sustainable way of living, including nature preservation, land use protection, soil protection, energy conservation and others have led to the question whether the tourism industry is still feasible (SIEGRIST 2014). At this point, it is also important to note that tourism in the Alps has always, and increasingly does, concentrated on only a number of locations, according to BÄTZING (2015b) no more than 300. While the transition to a more sustainable form of tourism is in general welcomed by tourists (MEGERLE 2018; WEHRLI et al. 2011) and also best-practice examples of a shift towards sustainable tourism exists (see: MEGERLE 2018; SIEGRIST 2014), it is still unclear whether this transition, which needs to take place on a technical and economical level, but also socially and culturally, will be able to take place fast enough (SIEGRIST 2014). At this point, it has to be added, however, that pre-industrial ways of cultivation are

usually regarded as the traditional or natural ways of using the land, while, as CARRER et al. (2020) points out, also these practices already had a great impact on the environment.

The economic development of the Alpine region is therefore right now on a turning point. Initiatives such as the Alpine Convention, the European Union and others promote sustainable and green economy. The possible future as well as initiatives on green development and economy are further discussed in CH. 2.2.6 and 2.3.3. Another reason, as BÄTZING (2015a) points out, why the economy in the Alps might change significantly, is the increasing importance of new technologies, such as EDV and remote working, which might lower the impact of accessibility. While this trend is ongoing, the exact implications of it are, however, hard to foresee.

While there is to date no comprehensive and up-to-date report on the economic situation of the whole of the Alps, the “*Report on the State of the Alps*” by the Alpine Convention 2017, specialising on greening the Economy in the Alpine region (ALPINE CONVENTION 2017a), compromises broad information on the general situation. However, the data is fairly inconsistent and outdated. The European ESPON programme, on the other hand, offers a number of economic indicators for the respective area, which are fairly comprehensive, but mainly only offer a low spatial resolution, also due to the fact that the EUSALP perimeter covers a much larger area (ESPON PROGRAMME 2020).

Looking at the Gross Domestic Product (GDP; FIG 4) of the European Regions, most recent data from 2019 shows that large parts are above the EU27 average of 25 060 (EUROSTAT 2021). In fact, only two regions, *Eastern Slovenia* (22 100) and *Franche-Comté* (24 000), which, however, only just brushes the AlpCon-perimeter, are below this average. While large parts are between 26 000 and 50 000, the economic strength of Switzerland and Liechtenstein is striking. When looking in addition at the data of ESPON PROGRAMME (2020), which, while it dates back to 2015, has a better special resolution, generally, a slight north-to-south gradient within the Alpine perimeter can be observed. Even on the larger scale though, the great disparity of these numbers within the area can be noted.

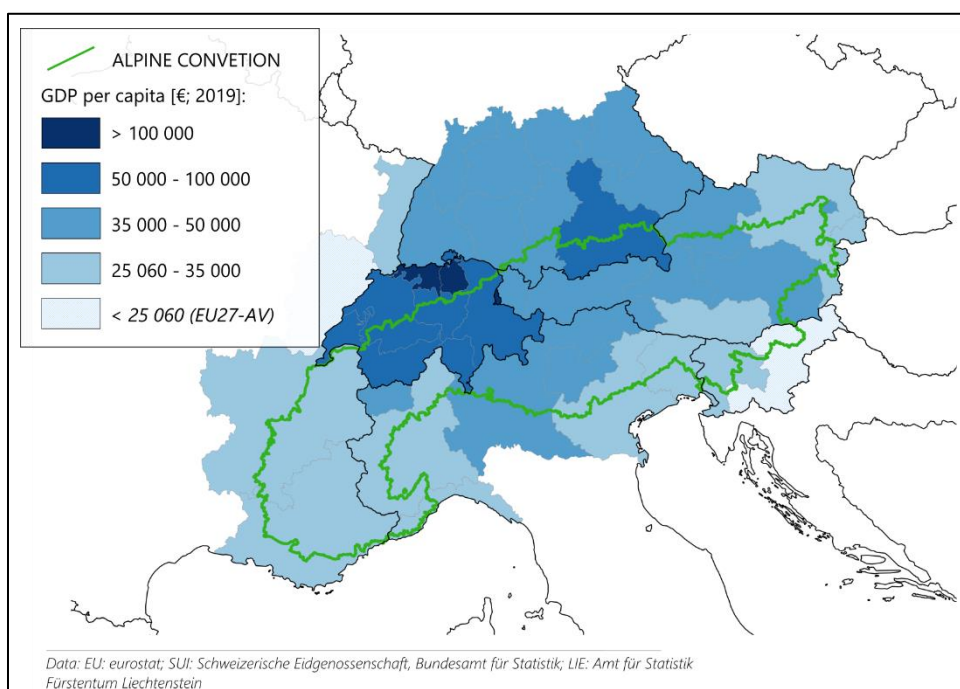


Figure 4: GDP per capita in the Alpine regions.

The Unemployment rate within the area of the Alpine Convention is only available from ESPON as the reverse Employment rate, from the year 2018, showing the employment of people between 16-64. The graph shows above-EU-level rates (EU 2018: 73,2%; EUROSTAT 2019)) in all areas within, Austria, Switzerland and Germany as well as the area of Bolzano (Italy) and the west of Slovenia, while all other regions are below that number, which makes a very distinct separation between northern and southern and Alps. Between 2010 and 2018, employment rates have risen in all Alpine regions. Youth employment rates show a similar picture, although the distinction between north and south is even greater. For example, the difference between the two neighbouring regions of *Ostschweiz* (Switzerland; 4,8%) and *Lombardia* (Italy; 20,8%) is as large as 16 percent points. While the ESPON data is fairly low in resolution, the aforementioned "*Report on the State of the Alps*" (ALPINE CONVENTION 2017a) draws a more detailed picture, using data from the national statistical offices, however, the data is quite outdated (between 2010 and 2012) and misses the whole of Switzerland and Germany. However, the more detailed picture shows that the regions offer much local variety in the numbers. For example, the comparably low employment rate of the large Rhone-Alps region is mainly due to very low numbers in the west of the area, while closer to the Italian border, the rates are much higher, amongst the highest in the Alpine region.

2.1.5 Alpine identity and image

The image of the Alps varies significantly over time and between different groups of inhabitants and otherwise involved people. According to BÄTZING (2015a), the image of the Alps has gone through the following steps in its history:

- 1) Until the 18th century: "*montes horribles*": The Alps are seen as dark and scary places, where only Barbarian and primitives live.
- 2) From 1760 onwards, the Alps were increasingly "romanticised" and are now places, where people want to go and relax. BÄTZING (2015a) relates this to the increasing ability of the people to control the environment, which is why the Alps no longer offer a danger.
- 3) With the start of different ecological movements starting in 1970, the image turns away from the idyllic picture towards the perception of all the environmental destruction and problems.

While these pictures define how the Alps are seen from the outside mainly, BÄTZING (2015a: 20) argues that the image of the area by its actual inhabitants is far less spectacular, but rather pragmatic.

French geographer MATHIEU PETITE (2011) has identified 5 re-occurring images of the Alps. The following table briefly describes the 5 images, drawing also from the research of DEL BIAGGIO (2016a), who uses PETITE's classification as foundation for her research with actors in Alpine networks, who she interrogated on their image of the Alps.

Table 1: The five main images of the Alps after PETITE 2011, DEL BIAGGIO 2016.

1	Aesthetic image	This very pragmatic image of the Alps emphasizes the physical and geomorphological characteristics. The Alps are connected through a set of certain defining natural features, which compose the whole of the Alpine arc. This image is also reflected in the Definition of mountains by the EU as “Massifs” (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015: 10; EVRAND 2014: 133). The uniqueness of the natural structure then leads to the development of the typical socio-cultural features. The shared natural environment creates a common culture. Alpine inhabitants are thus described as “<i>mountaineers with similar mentality</i>” (DEL BIAGGIO 2016: 133), beyond national or linguistic barriers. This image is commonly used in advertisements, where the aesthetic image of the Alps is highlighted.
2	Patriotic image	Mountains as instrument to increase national feelings. In DEL BIAGGIO (2016a)ʼs research, this image did not occur.
3	Touristic image	Mountains as environments for sport and leisure activities. This image emphasizes the touristic potential of the region as one of the main drivers of development.
4	Ecological image	Mountains as a natural resource. Strengthened by the fact that the Alps are one of the last close-to-nature regions of Europe, this image is shared by many Alpine associations, with the term of sustainability being promoted prominently.
5	Nostalgic image	The link between mountain societies and the environment in which they live is idealized. The nostalgic image is rarely seen in the investigation. Traditional ways of living and farming are emphasized, however, more in the context of sustainable living than nostalgically.

While different images of the Alps exist for its inhabitants, actors and users from outside, the identity of the inhabitants and the degree to which they identify themselves with the region is closely connected the making of the region (CH. 2.4.1). As DEL BIAGGIO (2010: 139) states, “*in the Alps, the distinctiveness of the Alpine territory, its landscape and its topographic specificities seem to be powerful engines for collective action, which, in turn, helps to build a common identity*”. As regions are, since the constructivist turn, no longer regarded simply as “*objective, hierarchically nested levels of spatial organization*” (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015: 2), but generally are seen as in the literature complex social constructs (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015; DEL BIAGGIO 2016; DEL BIAGGIO 2010; PAASI 2010), regional identity plays an important role in creation of them.

While the image of the Alps varies, DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) found common characteristics that can be seen. These are strongly connected to the “*proudest of being a mountain inhabitant*” (IBID.: 151), the existence of a “*community of problems*” (IBID: 171) as well as the common goal of sustainable development in the region, in particular by the actors of institutions and networks (IBID: 201).

2.2 Trends and challenges for regional development in the Alps

The Alpine region to date faces a number of challenges and problems when it comes to its regional development, some related to global issues, some very specific to the region. The ALPINE CONVENTION (2016) names demographic change and the climate crisis as the two most pressing, which lead to other problems, such as *"the decrease of inhabitants in areas that are more difficult to access, [which] contributes to the decline of the cultural and economic life in these areas, the abandonment of farming and the loss of the traditional cultural landscape"* (IBID: 4). Furthermore, *"an increasing mobility with dramatic growth rates in transport for people and goods, a trend towards the urbanisation of many Alpine valleys and growing conflicts connected with the limited soil reserves in the Alps"* (IBID: 12), were stated by the AlpCon 2016. In the following, a brief overview on the most apparent contemporary challenges in the Alpine region is given.

2.2.1 Physio-geographic challenges

The Alps, as a young and very rough mountain range, contains various types of valleys, basins and high-elevation zones, with the individual regions very different from each other. This contains, on the one hand, the difference between the Mediterranean-influenced south side versus the cold-temperate north side, on the other hand, the higher elevated west side versus the gentler eastern Alps, as well as various very specific micro-characteristics in the inner Alps.

BÄTZING (2015a) generally divides the Alps in the more preferential and less preferential areas in terms of settlement and cultivation. The former includes inner-Alpine dry zones, the Mediterranean-influenced south side, and some south-facing slopes, while the latter include the northside and the continental-influenced east Alps. This, of course, also correlates with the beforementioned *"Jungsiedlungsfläche"* and *"Alsiedlungsfläche"*. It can, however, nowadays not be backed up with data anymore, as the mentioned preferred areas shows no better economic development than the latter, much rather the opposite.

Another major characteristic of the Alps is its very *"volatile natural dynamic"*, which is due to the relative youth of the mountain range and often leads to phenomena generally regarded as natural disasters (IBID.: 2015a).

2.2.2 Accessibility

Accessibility is a major driving factor for economic development and subsequently also the demographic development of a region. Swiss researcher FRIEDER VOLL (2012) carried out a comprehensive study on accessibility in the Alps, including a review on existing literature and studies on the topic to that date. As he argues that accessibility is becoming increasingly important in an advancingly globalized world, where *"the rural areas are either closely interconnected with urban areas or the relative distance to them increases"* (IBID: 182) – either one or the other.

While he criticises existing studies and rubrics for measuring accessibility, for example by ESPON (it is to mention that ESPON has released new measures of accessibility since the publication of VOLL's report), as they generalize different levels of the same, he developed his own system regarding accessibility, identifying three Levels of scale:

- 1) Level A: Accessibility to global- or euro-cities. The distance the urban centres with high level of global connectedness is measured in order to assess the connection to the global market.
- 2) Level B: Accessibility to employment-centres. The distance to supra-regional centres is measured, with the aim of assessing traditional city-rural-relationships.
- 3) Level C: Accessibility to local centres, which are sub-regional centres or suburbs with good local supply and basic facilities.

Using his approach, VOLL (2012) measures the three levels separately and comes up with the following conclusion, while at the same time emphasizing the difficulty to draw general conclusions, as the area is so heterogenous:

- 1) Bad accessibility does not necessarily lead to negative regional development. Examples of this are touristically strong areas such as *Ötztal* (Austria).
- 2) Good accessibility does not automatically mean good regional development (e.g. Milan, Ljubljana).
- 3) Good accessibility does not mean good supply of basic goods (e.g. towns close to Vienna, Nice).
- 4) Good accessibility on Level A is not connected to good accessibility on the Levels B and C.
- 5) Being in the influence area of a Metropolis can also have a bad impact on the accessibility of smaller municipalities.
- 6) The removal of supply infrastructure would lead to further polarisation – to date the situation is still relatively good.

ESPON provides a number of indicators for accessibility, including “car-travel time to next doctor” and “car-travel time to next train station” (FIG. 5), both of which correspond to accessibility level C. Unfortunately, raw data, as available on the ESPON Database³ only offers lower spatial resolution. However, the *ESPON Alps 2050 Atlas* (ESPON PROGRAMME 2019), provides the measures in highest resolution, as seen in FIG. 5.

It can clearly be seen that inner-Alpine areas generally have higher values, as would be expected (see FIG. 5). From the Figure, no general trend in terms of countries or areas can be derived, however, in Slovenia, *“in consequence of the big municipality size the picture is not that differentiated. Longer distances caused by the bigger municipality size lead to higher values for the whole municipality”* (IBID: 16). Further, lower numbers along the great Alpine valley, such as Inn, Adige or Rhein can be observed. Strikingly, the numbers significantly fall off outside of the AlpCon-perimeter, underlining the fact that this encloses the physically most disadvantaging area.

³ https://database.espon.eu/search/?f=topics_exact:Transport%20and%20Accessibility

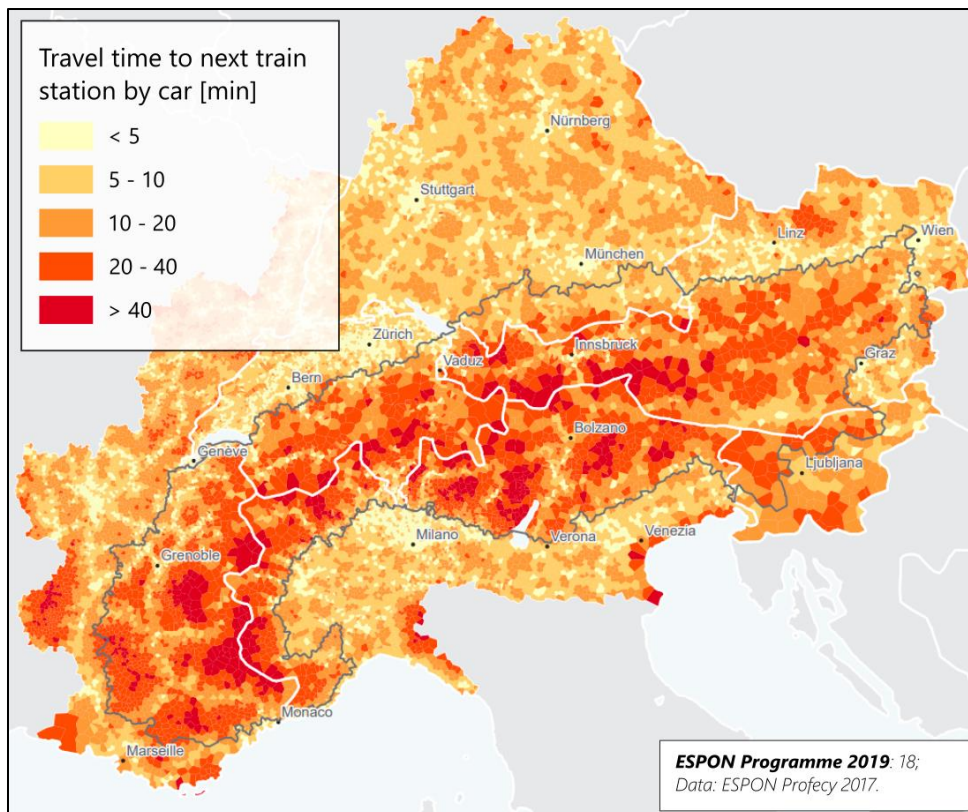


Figure 5: Car-travel time to next train station by car 2017. (ESPON Programme 2019: 18, edited)

2.2.3 Mobility and Transport

Mobility and Transport are one of the urgent matters in the Alpine region to date, as also emphasised by the fact that the very first (of now 9) special reports of the Alpine Convention in 2007 was on the topic of *“Transport and Mobility in the Alps”* (ALPINE CONVENTION 2007). It is also subject to one of the special protocols of the Alpine convention, called *“Protocol On The Implementation Of The 1991 Alpine Convention In The Field Of Transport”*. The topic has since been a major concern for the AlpCon, as an own working group on transport exists, with recent publications on modal shift in trans-Alpine freight transport, reduction of mobility demand or sustainable modes of transport in Alpine cities show (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022c; ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a; ALPINE CONVENTION 2020b; BORER BLINDENBACHER et al. 2020). For EUSALP, Mobility is also one of 9 action groups (AG4) (EUSALP 2020).

With the volume of traffic having increased by more than five times in the last fifty years (BÄTZING 2015a), experiencing only a slight dip during the financial crisis 2008, the total volume of freight transport has reached at total of 224 mt in 2019, which is about 1% of the total freight volume of the European union (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a; EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2020). There is, however, significant differences between the countries, as, while the freight traffic increases in the region in total, e.g. France has shown a slight decline in the last 20 years (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a; ESPON PROGRAMME 2019). In the mode of transport, generally the volume of transit on roads is becoming more important than by train, with only Switzerland, which has as explicitly invested in railway, still transporting the majority of goods by railways still. (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a; BÄTZING 2015a).

Today, the Alps are part of seven of the nine so called TEN-T (*Trans-European Networks – Transport*), including routes that span the Alps north-to-south as well as east-to-west. These

are the highest-priority European trans-national transportation links, as defined by the EC, including both rail and road. FIG. 6 shows a depiction of the TEN-T lines crossing the Alpine region (ESPON PROGRAMME 2018). It becomes apparent that the Alpine region lies right between several *Metropoleis*. At least four of the lines cross the Alps directly, while the other brush the perimeter. Additionally, the EUSALP Alps2050 vision (ESPON PROGRAMME 2018) has introduced a number of so called “Backbone linkages”, which altogether form a comprehensive network of linkages of transport in the Alpine region. These form the basis for future investments in Infrastructure, including railway, which is visible in the alps by the construction of big projects like the *Brenner base tunnel*.

Despite these efforts, the report from the Alpine Convention states that “according to current trends, rail infrastructure under construction would barely stabilise the rail share of transalpine traffic at 30 %” (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a: 35), and further adds that with freight traffic ever increasing, new solutions have to be found. The report states a total of 11 recommendations, including further strengthening the railway network, investing in monitoring and research and investigating new innovative technologies (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a: 57).

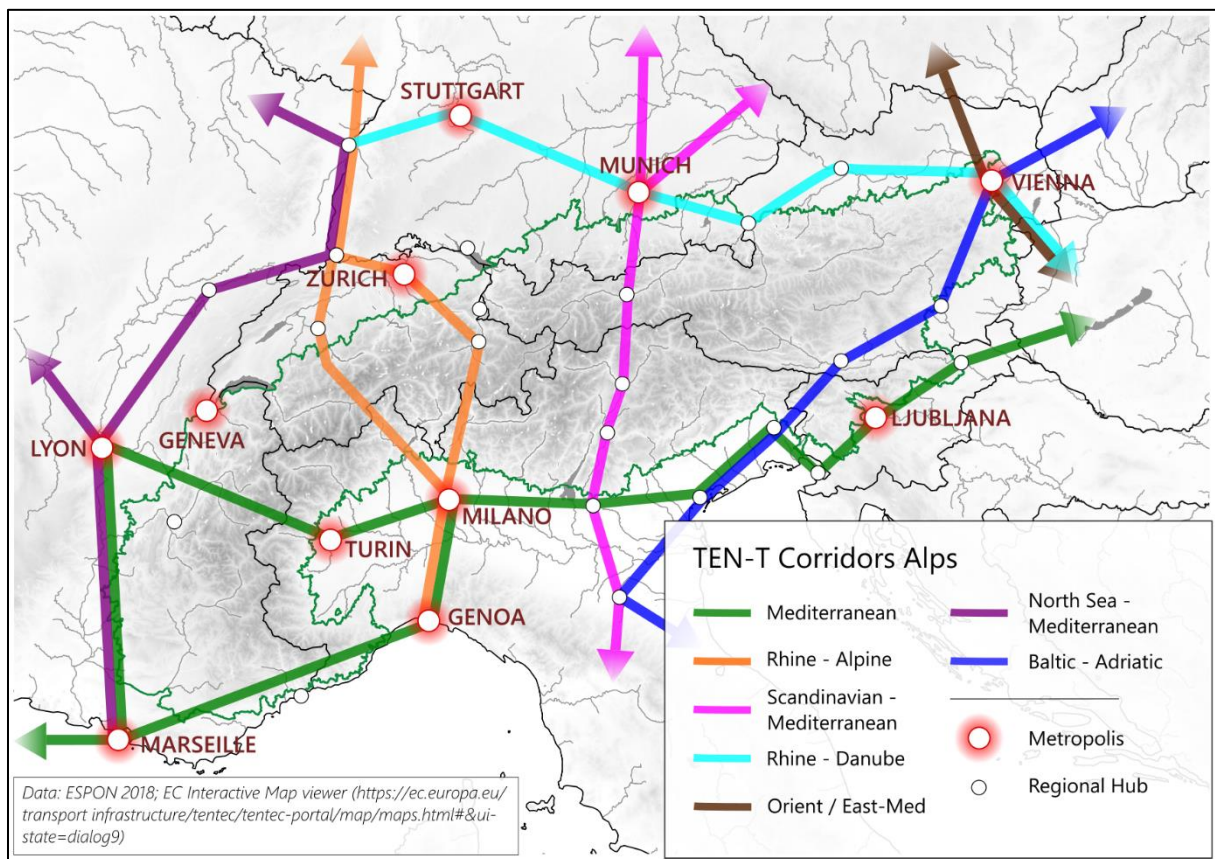


Figure 6: TEN-T (Trans-European Networks - Transport) Corridors in the Alpine Region.

With the freight traffic being a major challenge for the Alpine region, it is not to forget that also passenger traffic, both long-distance and locally, provides major challenges. Further initiatives recommended by the Alpine convention include a report (BORER BLINDENBACHER et al. 2020), which focuses on measures to reduce mobility demand and create more jobs in rural areas and location-independent jobs, a shift towards more sustainable freight traffic modes and more environmentally sustainable passenger traffic. Another report, also from the period

of 2019-2020, covers in detail *“Measures On Sustainable Mobility In The Alpine Towns & Cities”* (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020b).

With the traffic ever increasing, a number of problems arise, or as BÄTZING (2015a: 145) phrases, *“while the transit traffic used to represent a positive factor in pre-industrial times, it has developed into an ever-increasing burden since.”* These problems include (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a; ALPINE CONVENTION 2020b; BÄTZING 2015; BORER BLINDENBACHER et al. 2020):

- 1) Noise, especially in valleys, where the noise reflects from the steep flanks.
- 2) Air quality and fine particles, especially with inversion-weather.
- 3) Increase in emission of greenhouse gasses.

Altogether, traffic mobility and Transport, closely connected to accessibility, are clearly one of the most pressing matters in the Alpine space, both on the small scale of individual municipalities, as well as on the scale of the whole Alpine arc and the increasing transit traffic. The need for a comprehensive strategy is crucial, or as the ESPON PROGRAMME (2018: 41) frames it: *“Non-action would mean almost permanent congestion situations, increasing noise and air pollution and a widely-shared sense of decreasing quality of life in large scale corridors.”* Naturally, the traffic problem is one that can only be solved via trans-national efforts.

2.2.4. Environment protection and climate crisis

The Alps are a very diverse landscape, which is home to some unique forms of nature. While environment protection in the Alps has only started in the late 19th century, with the first national parks opening in the early 20th century (PLASSMANN et al. 2016), nowadays there are almost 1000 protected areas in the Alps, encompassing about 28% of the area of the Alpine convention (ALPARC 2022). However, this number is relativized by the fact that many of these do in fact not conform with international standards and of those which do, most are located at an elevation of above 2000m (PLASSMANN et al. 2016). It is furthermore important to distinguish between two general types of environment protection, the *“wilderness concept”*, which describes areas totally left untouched by human interference and *cultural landscapes*, which are much more common in the Alps (IBID 2016). PLASSMANN et al. (2016) further argue that even the “wild” landscapes in the Alps are likely to once have been cultivated by humans. This, however, may not be a huge problem, as both the “wild” and the “cultural” landscapes provide the circumstances for rich biodiversity and precious habitats (IBID 2016).

The threats to natural landscapes, both “wild” and cultural” are manifold, including tourism and tourism infrastructure, inadequate settlement policy, infrastructures and settlements in general settlements, transports, agriculture and mono-cultures, energy production and industrial and mining activities (IBID 2016), as well as, of course, the climate crisis, which is discussed in more detail later-on in this chapter.

Following the approach of CHURCH (2020), the Alps may be seen as a “ecoregion”, which are regions that are defined by ecological connection and boundaries rather than administrative ones. As such, an ecoregion is defined by the fact the various ecological processes within the region influence each other, independent of political borders. These problems are called “trans-boundary problems” and include in the case of the Alps topics such as water pollution, air quality or melting glaciers, which are problems that cannot be solved by national institutions

alone. This emphasises the need for a coordinated Alpine-wide agenda of environment protection, as is aimed by the AlpCon and its connected associations.

While the broad topic of environment protection may include a wide variety of topics, some of the most important ones include the protection of natural or traditional-cultural landscapes, protection of endangered species, soil protection and, of course, climate crisis adaption, which plays into all of these areas. A specific focus by the Alpine convention is laid upon Biodiversity, and, connected to this, connectivity of natural landscapes, as highlighted by the protocol "Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation" (ALPINE CONVENTION 1994b). As the AlpCon states *"It is important that the whole territory remains permeable and liveable for all species"* (IBID 2022d). In this context, the connectivity of the individual habitats is crucial, which explains the need to *"provide so-called ecological corridors and 'steppingstones'"* (IBID 2022d). According to a Report by the AlpCon 2020, mountain regions *"mountain regions are home to over 85% of the world's species of amphibians, birds and mammals, many of which are exclusive to mountains"* (IBID 2020c: 9,10), with the Alps providing a significant part to this.

The Alps are over-proportionally impacted by the climate crisis. The average rate of warming of air temperature in the Alps is with a rate of 0.3°C/10 years significantly higher than the global average of 0.2°C/10 years (NIGRELLI and CHIARLE 2021), and is expected to increase even more in the next decades (GOBIET et al. 2014). The fact that it is expected that by 2050, many of the glaciers below 3000m altitude will be gone, is especially worrying for the Alps, as many of its key industries, such as tourism or hydropower production are relying on the periglacial environment (NIGRELLI and CHIARLE 2021). The ALPINE CONVENTION (2016) states that it is required to provide measures in almost all sectors, from agriculture to tourism. While the climate crisis will eventually impact all sectors of the economy and daily life, immediate impacts, which are already happening to date, include, according to the most recent *IPCC report* (IPCC 2022a; IPCC 2022b):

- 1) Instable glaciers and glacial lakes. Melting of glaciers with a drop in runoff is already happening in some cases (see also: DAVAZE et al. 2020).
- 2) Increase in natural disasters, such as floods, landslides avalanches and heavy rains and droughts, including instability of slopes due to the melting of permafrost.
- 3) Decreasing snow cover and depth.
- 4) Changing circumstances for agriculture. While in some places, agriculture is negatively impacted through the climate crisis and the aforementioned increase in natural disasters, some areas may also benefit from a warmer climate.
- 5) Decrease in hydropower production (see also: BOMBELLI et al. 2019).
- 6) Growing competition between different sectors, such as hydropower, agriculture, and tourism.
- 7) Loss of identity and cultural heritage due to retreating glaciers and changing environment, which may also result in a loss of tourism.

While this, of course, endangers many of the contemporary industries, most importantly tourism, PROBST (2014) also sees some opportunities for the Alps in this context, for example as an area of summer retreat ("*Sommerfrische*") or in terms of "*mediterraneanisation*". While this point is also mentioned by the latest IPCC report (IPCC 2022a: 63), it is stressed that the evidence for this happening is limited. BÄTZING (2015a) further points out the opportunity the Alps have in

this context, to potentially accept a pioneering role when it comes to climate-sensitive economy and living.

2.2.5. Demographic change and Migration

With the general demographic trends in the Alps already discussed in Ch. 2.1.3, in the following only a short summary of the most important implications and some possible strategies is presented. As has been discussed, the demographic development of the Alps still follows the pattern of uneven urban and rural development. Peripheral communes experience a significant emigration to urban centres, especially by young people, which further induces aging in these areas, acknowledging, however, that these trends are very different from sub-region to sub-region (ELMI et al. 2018; ESPON PROGRAMME 2018). Combined with the trend towards the reduction of basic supply infrastructure such as supermarkets, post offices and public transport in most areas of Europe, these areas experience major challenges (EGLI 2014). From the governance perspective, this does not only include pressure on infrastructures and cultural dynamic, but also on the financial capacities (ESPON PROGRAMME 2018; MALI et al. 2010). As the ESPON PROGRAMME (2018) points further out, this trend may lead to additional polarisation of the region.

Recognizing the demographic trends, the ESPON PROGRAMME (2018) points out though that a reverse-trend is possible and may be triggered by specific political action. Especially the digitalisation is expected to provide opportunities for the disadvantaged areas. Special focus in initiatives is often laid upon youth out-migration, as this is seen as a particularly important aspect. As MAROT et al. (2015) show, in almost all areas the proportion of very young people (0-14) has declined in the last centuries and the *old-age-dependency ratio* (OADR; relation between elderly (>65) and working age population (15-65)) has deteriorated in many parts. While initiatives to stop this trend are made, MAROT et al. (2015) criticise that these are mainly “*policy related*”, meaning guidelines and reports are published rather than actual infrastructure being built. Both the ALPINE CONVENTION (2015: 61) and the EU-funded project DEMOCHANGE (2011) have started pilot projects on topics such as housing, social connectivity, mobility and tourism to address out-migration, but these are mostly only small-scale best-practise approaches.

A set of strategies for stopping emigration of young and well-educated people from rural areas has been put forward by STAUDIGL (2013: 73–79), who states the following 7 strategies:

- 1) Funding of SMEs.
- 2) Development of infrastructure, most importantly railway.
- 3) Supporting Small and local economic cycles.
- 4) Spatial and regional planning policies.
- 5) Guaranteeing of basic supplies such as supermarkets and public institutions.
- 6) Authentic tourism.
- 7) Strengthen regional identity and forms of traditional forestry and agriculture.

Altogether, it may be said that the demographic change in the Alps is a complex one, varying from region to region. It is, however, possible to derive some basic patterns, such as the out-migration of young and well-educated people in general and, in particular, from rural areas. With the reasons for this being well investigated, counteracting these trends is still a great challenge.

2.2.6. Future of the Alps

While the future of the Alps is, of course, impossible to predict, a number of publications exist, which speculate on possible future scenarios of development. These include, among others, German geographer WERNER BÄTZING (2015b), who published 5 perspectives for the Alps, the ESPON Program, which includes 4 “scenarios” for the Alpine region (ESPON PROGRAMME 2018) or (CIPRA 2022a) on “the Alps in 70 years”.

BÄTZING (2015b) describes the five possible perspectives for the Alps as follows:

- 1) Connection to modernity: Through different sort of investments, including infrastructure, marketing, tourism and regional centres, the economic growth of the Alps is extended from the few centres to the whole of the area. This perspective is promoted often by regional decision makers. While he sees this perspective as a possibility, BÄTZING points out that a lot of very well-thought-out measures and investments are needed. Furthermore, this scenario is likely to contradict with nature preservation.
- 2) Everything on metropoleis: Resources are concentrated on a few metropolitan centres, as trying to develop the whole region equally is not to be sustained. In the face of the climate crisis, infrastructures in high-elevation zones are no longer maintained, everything is moved into the valleys. BÄTZING evaluates this perspective as a radical break with tradition, however, it might result in positive effects in terms of nature preservation.
- 3) Fun in the amusement park: The Alps are reduced to its function as a tourism destination, in which all possible areas are transferred into spaces for leisure activities. This again would mean a complete break with the past and include massive building.
- 4) Water castle and energy production: The region is reduced to its function as a provider of sustainable energy from hydropower, solar energy, and wind energy. While this may enable the supply of large part of Europe with sustainable energy, the area would no longer provide any sort of quality of living.
- 5) All wilderness: The Alps have a long history of nature protection. If the trend continues, large parts of the Alps may fall under strict protection. This perspective seems, however, on stark contrast with human nature.

The ESPON PROGRAMME (2018), on the other hand, distinguishes the following four scenarios:

- 1) Status Quo: the contemporary trends are carried forward. Since the spatial development is shaped by national and domestic politics mainly, a very complex and dispersed spatial structure is likely to evolve, with strong mountain-lowland and urban-rural disparities.
- 2) Protected Alps: The focus is laid upon the unique natural and cultural heritage, with tourism, transport and settlement adjusted accordingly in a most sustainable way.
- 3) Functional Space: The focus is on connectivity and transport, as “*smart spatial development strategies overcome existing frictions with innovative political agreements and with adequate infrastructure investments*” (ESPON PROGRAMME 2018: 27). In this, political and natural boundaries are overcome.
- 4) European Core: Being right in the middle of Europe, the Alpine space attracts skilled workers and entrepreneurial investments, resulting in prosperity and economic growth.

The Visions presented by CIPRA (2022a) are essentially imaginations of different people involved in Alpine research, but are rather visionary than scientific. However, many of the same topics are mentioned, such as strengthening the unique landscape or digitalisation and remote working.

While these scenarios, despite being based on solid data, are solely speculations, they provide an important guideline for decision makers to image the long-term outcomes of contemporary measures. The diversity of the scenarios highlights the potential of the region, the relation between development and economic value added and the protection of the natural space appears to be central in all cases.

2.3. Sustainable development in the Alps

As one answer to the manifold challenges described above, today, a clear trend towards aiming for a more *sustainable* development can be seen. Many of the initiatives both on national, transnational and EU-level have the clear goal of promoting such as, for example, the AlpCon states that it is *"leading the way for sustainable life in the Alps"* (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022b), CIPRA commits to bring together *"people who are committed to sustainable development in the Alps"* (CIPRA 2022b), AtY states *"special responsibility for the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage, and endeavours to ensure that it is developed in a sustainable way"* (ATY 2022a), EUSALP commits itself *"as institutions to create sustainable solutions"* (EUSALP 2022a) or the Interreg Alpine Space Program aims to *"foster the integration of sustainable economic development"* (INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2021).

While the term "sustainability" is widely and readily used, no uniform definition of what it means, exist. This becomes especially challenging in a multi-lingual space such as the Alps, as different translations in different languages exist (e.g. German: *"Nachhaltigkeit"*; Italian: *"sostenibilità"* French: *"développement durable"*). In the following, only a very brief overview on the development of the term and its current interpretation in spatial planning is given, with focus on how the institutions in question define the term. More in-detail discussion in the term is provided, among others, by FARLEY and SMITH (2020).

2.3.1 The term sustainability

Sustainability is today one of the most widely used terms, not only in science but also in governance documents, media and public life (FARLEY and SMITH 2020).

Originating from a resource-economic concept (KOCH and KRELLENBERG 2021), the term has now evolved to something much more complex. This usually incorporates the three sub-sections of sustainability, Environment, Society and Economy. The general concept of sustainability has been known since roughly the 16th century, when humans began to have a significant impact on the environment, with authors such as Thomas Malthus famously questioning the limits of human population growth, followed later-on by the influential *"Limits of growth"* by the club of Rome in 1972. (FARLEY and SMITH 2020)

The term is understood to have entered the stage of worldwide recognition in 1987 through the famous *"Brundtland report"* (original title: *Our Common Future*; WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT 1987), by the WCED (World commission on Environment and Development), a UN-related organisation. In this report, the term was first defined as

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (FARLEY and SMITH 2020; OWENS and LEGERE 2015; SANTILLO 2007). The original definition was therefore fairly vague, and also very human-centred, which is, as FARLEY and SMITH (2020) argue, one of the reasons for its subsequent success. In the following 2 years, up to 140 different definitions of the term have been developed, rising to an estimated number of 300 nowadays (SANTILLO 2007).

Further important steps in the development of the term were subsequently made by the UNCED 1992 ("Rio summit"), which resulted in the "Agenda 21", the "2000 MDGs" (Millennium Development Goals) and, building on this, the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) from 2013 (FARLEY and SMITH 2020). Recently, in the light of the ever-more present climate crisis and movements such as FFF, the term has experienced even more attention (CLUNE and ZEHNDER 2020; OWENS and LEGERE 2015). Nowadays, "sustainable development" is often used exchangeable with climate-friendly (FARLEY and SMITH 2020).

The most widely used models of sustainability include the *Three Pillars model* (FIG. 7: A) and the *Triple Bottom Line Model*. Both models essentially state that the three pillars of Environment, Economy and Society combined make up sustainability. The two models are often used interchangeably and do not have a clear difference. This definition of the three pillars model is not to be confused with the one introduced by CLUNE and ZEHNDER (2020), which confusingly has the same name, but describes a different, implementational approach.

As FARLEY and SMITH (2020) criticize, these models neither take into account any sense of weighting, nor is the time component regarded. Themselves, the authors prefer the so-called *Nested model*, which put a level of hierarchy to the three components. According to this, environmental sustainability provides the basis for the societal one, which again does so for economic sustainability (see FIG. 7: B).

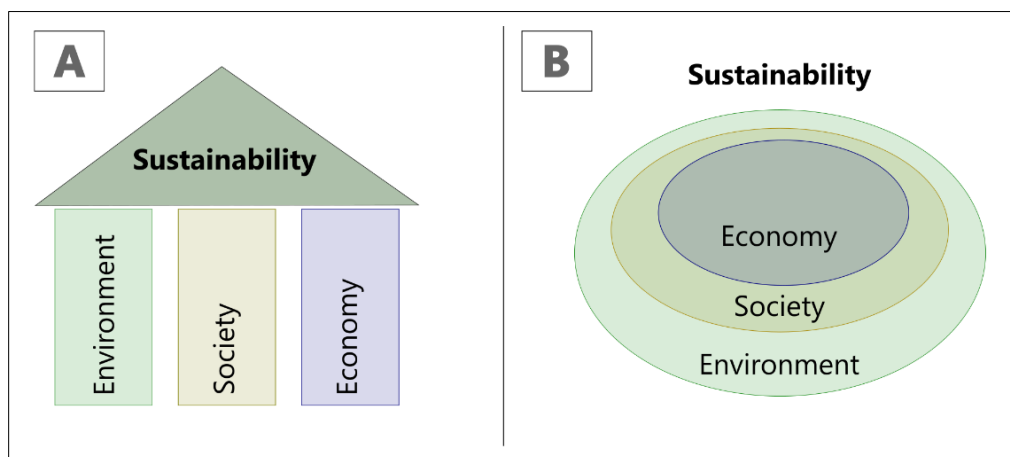


Figure 7: Different models of sustainability after FARLEY and SMITH 2020. (A) Three-Pillars-Model, (B) Nested model, as used in neo-sustainability.

One central question regarding sustainable development is whether it can be achieved within the framework of growth or not. While most contemporary definitions see so-called "sustainable growth", meaning a growing economy with lesser resource input via resource efficiency, as possible, other strands move towards what FARLEY and SMITH (2020) refer to as "neo-sustainability". FARLEY and SMITH (2020) argue that never-ending growth is forbidden by basic physical laws of thermodynamics, which is why sustainable development can only be achieved by de-growth, going as far as stating, "when the underlying interpretation of sustainability is "sustained

growth," the definition and term have little meaning" (IBID: 133). On the other hand, authors such as MUKHOPADHYAY et al. (2017: 18) argue that *"[...] not only is growth sustainable, but it is a necessary condition for improved environmental management"*, as markets are an essential tool to promote sustainable development and support resource-efficiency.

Conclusively, no general definition of the term sustainability exists. It does, however, usually consist of the three pillars Environment, Society and Economy, all three of which are to develop in a way that resources are being sustained, usually including aspects of both inter-national and inter-generational justice. No agreement on whether the three pillars are equally important or not and to what extent growth can be sustainable at all exists, however. This, as FARLEY and SMITH (2020; also: OWENS and LEGERE 2015; SANTILLO 2007) argue, is a major problem, as the title of their book suggests: *"if it's everything, it's nothing"*.

2.3.2 Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals are a set of seventeen goals proposed by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Building on the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) from 2015, the agenda aims to *"stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet"*. The 17 goals thereby *"seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls"*, while integrating the *"the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental"* (UNITED NATIONS 2015: 1). The seventeen goals of the convention can be seen in FIG 8. The resolution has been signed by all 193 members of the UN, however, it is non-legally binding, which means, the actual implementation is up to the respective countries (UNITED NATIONS 2022; UNITED NATIONS 2019).

Learning from the criticism on the MDGs, the SDGs aim to be more comprehensive and offer a better way of monitoring the success (KOCH and KRELLENBERG 2021). For this, a comprehensive report on the state of implementation is published by the UN annually, the most recent one being from 2022 (UNITED NATIONS 2022). Despite this effort, two main strands of criticism on the SDGs exist. First, the *ambition gap* and on secondly, the *implementation gap* (KOCH and KRELLENBERG 2021).

The SGGs form an important basis of sustainable development in the Alps, as they are a key component of the Alpine Convention. While the AlpCon, of course, has existed for much longer than the SDGs, it still regards itself as *"a transnational example of the implementation of the SDGs"* (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022b). Many of the associations and network working on the Alpine space then again base their work on the AlpCon, such as ATY (*"[...] particular commitment to the implementation of the Alpine Convention"*; ATY 2022a) or AiA (*"the basic and guiding principle for sustainable development is the Alpine Convention"*; ALLIANCE IN THE ALPS 2022).

The SDGs consist of seventeen goals, as depicted in FIG. 8, each of which consists of targets, adding up to a total of 169 targets. The targets exist parallel to each other, not prioritising any. While the SDGs generally acknowledge the three-fold nature of sustainability, they name five pillars of implementation: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership.

The term “sustainability” itself is defined as follows (UNITED NATIONS 2022):

- 1) “[...] as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
- 2) “[...] calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet.”
- 3) “It is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. [...]”
- 4) “Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. [...]”



Figure 8: The 17 SDGs as stated by the UN 2015 (<https://www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/en/topics/sustainable-development-2030-agenda-sdgs.html>)

As such, the SDGs provide a very comprehensive picture of sustainability, adding a large social component to a concept, which originated from an ecological motive. Clearly, a succession of the understanding of sustainability by earlier UN-related documents can be seen, especially as the SDGs do not break with the paradigm of “sustainable growth”, stating to aim to “create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth” (UNITED NATIONS 2015: 3).

2.3.3 Sustainability in the Alps

As stated above, sustainable development is the common trend that combines all the organisations within the Alpine perimeter. As further explained in CH. 2.4, this common goal is one of the very reasons, the Alps are considered a coherent macro-region. As there is no collective agreement on the definition of “sustainable development”, the interpretation is up to the individual actors. On transnational level, the main drivers in the Alps are, on the one hand, EU-related institutions such as Interreg, EUSALP or INTERREG, on the other hand, CIPRA-related institutions like AtY, Alliance in the Alps, ALPARC, ISCAR and more (see Ch. 2.4).

On European level, sustainability is a key objective of both Interreg Alpine Space and EUSALP (EUSALP 2022a; INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2021). Both Interreg Alpine space (Ch. 2.4.7.1; four “priorities”) and EUSALP (Ch. 2.4.7.2; three “thematic policy areas”) define their areas of action individually, not committing themselves to a definition of sustainable development. It is

important to note though that all organisations in the Alps are strongly interlinked, as the EU, of course, is one of the contract members of the AlpCon. Therefore, many common projects concerning the AlpCon or the SDGs are done.

With the implementation of the Alpine convention and its protocols, the goal of creating an Alpine-wide convention on the protection of the Alps was finally realized in 1992. The AlpCon therefore provides the first Alpine-wide guideline for sustainable development.

The Alpine convention, further explained in Ch. 2.4.3, does not offer a clear own definition of sustainability, despite recognising this concept as one of the core components of its work. The convention commits to *“the preservation and sustainable development of the Alps”* (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022a). In the original framework from 1991 (ALPINE CONVENTION 1991b), the term “sustainability” is not mentioned as such, only through *“sustained use of resources”* (IBID 1991b: 55). However, the first protocol on *“Spatial Planning And Sustainable Development”* (IBID 1991a), uses the term and defines a set of eight objectives to it. In the *“report on the state of the Alps”* 2011 (IBID 2011: 10), sustainable development is defined as one *“ [...] that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It also includes investment in basic infrastructures and social services, together with necessary regulatory, financial and technical tools, all of which contribute to improving the standard of living of the local population.”*

On its homepage (IBID 2022a), the organisation further states that the issue of climate change is *“overarching”* its work. While the AlpCon is much older than the SDGs, the convention still states that it is *“touching upon and directly contributing to the SDGs”*. While not mentioning it explicitly in the original framework, the AlpCon interprets sustainability in the context of growth, as can be seen in publications like (IBID 2011), where sustainability is linked with economic growth, coherent to the EU-approach. Altogether, the AlpCon provides an Alpine-specific set of measures that frame sustainable development. While no distinct definition of the term is given, the framework and protocols provide a comprehensive scope for action. While covering all three aspects of sustainability, the Convention may be interpreted to slightly prioritise the environmental aspect, as the preservation of the natural habitat is often highlighted separately.

2.4 Actors in the Alpine Region

2.4.1 Making of the Alps as a transnational entity

2.4.1.1 Historical context

The idea of the Alps as one Region goes back to need to tackle the same problems and challenges that arise throughout the whole Alpine arch as a unit. As the Alpine Convention phrases, *"issues and new questions have arisen in recent decades because of a more dynamic economic development in and around the Alps, the solution of which cannot be found at a national level"* (ALPINE CONVENTION 2016: 12). EVRAND (2014: 112) compromises the reasons for the Alps to be a Macro-regional entity to the following four points:

- The Alps are an economic and cultural meeting place (*"Begegnungsraum"*; IBID: 112).
- The Alps are one of the features, which define the European Space as common territory.
- Despite varieties, a mutual Alpine identity exists. Inner-Alpine diversity even helps to overcome barriers.
- The inhabitants of the Alps share the same challenges, environment, and potentials.

Another important factor has been added on by EVRAND (2014: 120) later, as he points out that the Alps have a strong history of regional autonomy and close-to-citizen governance. By creating a transborder territory, power may be shifted from national to regional entities.

While the individual regions of the Alps have always been interconnected strongly, the first steps towards a concrete platform of mutual cooperation were taken in 1972s, when the *ARGE (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenländer)* was founded between regions of Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Italy (STAUDIGL 2013). This association, which still exists today, is devoted to solve *"mutually interesting problems, especially of social and economic kind"* in *"good-neighbourly manner"* (ARGE ALP 2019). In the same time period, the organisation *CIPRA*, which had been founded in 1952 already, but at first mainly focused on research, started to focus more strongly on connecting and cooperation and subsequently became one of the decisive actors in implementing the Alpine Convention and, later on, further initiatives (CIPRA 2022c; DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015; DEL BIAGGIO 2011; WOLF 2016). The formulating of the Alpine Convention also almost coincides with the publication of the Agenda 21 by the United Nations in 1992, which mentioned the protection of mountain areas explicitly as its own point of action (point 13) (UNITED NATIONS 1992). This may be seen as the time, mountains entered the global policy arena (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015: 8).

In 1989, on the *"First International Alpine Conference of Environment Ministers Berchtesgaden"*, seven Alpine countries (excluding Monaco, Slovenia still as part of Yugoslavia) and the *Commission of European Communities* (today: European Commission) got together to form a declaration of 89 points, which stated the mutual will to protect and develop the Alps co-ordinately (ALPINE CONVENTION 1989; CIPRA 2015). Building on this declaration, the Alpine Convention was signed by the seven Alpine countries and the European Economic Community on 7. November 1991, Monaco joining later on by a special protocol in 1994 (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022a). It was fully implemented under international law on March 6th, 1995, forming the first Alpine-wide political and administrative structure (CIPRA 2015). This had the effect that, for the first time, it was possible to define the perimeter of what the *"Alpine Region"* encompasses (DEL BIAGGIO 2010). The Convention, explained in further detail in CH. 2.4.3, comes into force via a number

of individual protocols on specific matters. It forms the basis for many other Alpine-wide initiatives, including *Alpine Town of the Year*.

The second important Alpine-wide initiative is the EU-INTERREG program *Alpine Space* (EUAS), which similarly aims to strengthen the cooperation and coherence of the Alpine countries. Going back to the first EU initiative in the Region, the *INTERREG III B Alpine Space Program*, the program is with 2021-2027 already in its fourth period. Parallel to the Interreg program, the will to create a Macroregional strategy, by the term of *EUSALP*, similar to existing European Macro-regional strategies, such as the Danube Region *EUSDR*, has been expressed in order to improve cooperation between the different Alpine institutions (EUSALP 2022b; EVRAND 2014; STAUDIGL 2013). After the *Treaty of Lisbon* granted mountain regions, under the term of “*Massif*”, the same status as maritime or fluvial macro-regions, the implementation of a such strategy became a possibility (EV RAND 2014). This strategy, which spans over a significantly larger area than the AlpCon and EUAS (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2015: 62), has been endorsed by the Council of the European Union in 2015 (EUSALP 2022b). At this point it is also important to note that, as EV RAND (2014) states, the implementation of this strategy has been significantly facilitated by the fact that already a lot of Alpine-wide institutions existed before.

These initiatives, both from EU and NGO side, have been pioneer efforts of creating a national border-spanning European Macro-region. While ARGE has been the first European Cooperation of this kind (STAUDIGL 2013), the Alpine Convention has been an important role model for other mountain area initiatives, such as the Carpathian convention (ALPINE CONVENTION 2016).

2.4.1.2 Pan-Alpine institutionalisation

The Alps are increasingly seen as a transnational entity (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015; DEL BIAGGIO 2016; DEL BIAGGIO 2011; DEL BIAGGIO 2010; DEL BIAGGIO 2009; EVRAND 2014; STAUDIGL 2013), which is due to the two mentioned types of actors: the European Union and the local leaders and networks. Before going into further detail however, the terms of pan-Alpine and Institutionalisation are further explained.

The term “pan-Alpine” describes the entirety of the Alpine Region, crossing any national borders, pursuant to the literal meaning of the prefix “pan” being “all” (DEL BIAGGIO 2016: 202). However, it is not to be confused with the term pan-nationalism, which describes a similar concept, but is not usually used by researchers and institutions in the Alps. Pan-nationalism can be described as “*an attempt to unite states and peoples in a political, and above all, in a cultural union, based on common traits that despite their various peculiarities are able to form a ‘cultural family of nations’*” (BANOVIC-MARKOVSKA 2012: 74) as well as a “*counterweight to the numerous ethnic types of nationalism*” (IBID: 75) and therefore possibly fits the situation in the Alps fairly well. However, the term has been used in the past in various different circumstances, with radically different aims, which is why it can easily be misinterpreted or misunderstood, of course, also due to its relation to the term “nationalism” (MAXWELL 2022). Instead, the terms transnational and pan-Alpine are usually used in this context.

Institutionalization, on the other hand, most basically describes the formation of institutions on any scale. Regional institutionalization, a concept introduced by finish geographer ANSSI PAASI (1991: 243) is described as follows: “*a socio-spatial process in which a territorial unit emerges as part of the spatial structure of the society concerned, becomes established and*

identified in various spheres of social action and consciousness, and may eventually vanish or deinstitutionalize in regional transformation". As nation states loose importance in Europe increasingly, new regions are imagined and built (DEL BIAGGIO 2010). This is supported by the aim of the cohesion policy of the EU, which tries to strengthen the bonds across borders through supporting transnational initiatives (DURNWALDER 2014), which in turn leads to more power for the respective (macro-)regions. *"Thus the region has the opportunity to become a space of political governance, where regional identity could play an important role, since it is the basic component for the creation of new spaces of identification and belonging"* (DEL BIAGGIO 2010: 143).

With the EU-institutions only entering the stage later on, the decisive step in the creation of the pan-Alpine was the AlpCon, which both performed a "scaling-down" on the national level, as well as a "scaling-up" on local level, which is being implemented by the various specific lower-level-networks that have been initiated by CIPRA. While the Convention itself was incorporated by non-Alpine actors in cities such as Rome or Paris, the locally based networks that connect citizens, municipalities, nature parks or other entities were created in order to strengthen the involvement of the population (DEL BIAGGIO 2010).

One of the key points in this development was, as mentioned earlier (CH. 2.1.5), the common goal of various actors to move towards a more sustainable development, described by BALSIGER (2007: 4) as *"ecoregional institutionalization"*. The actors and inhabitants similarly *"share an image of the Alps as being, on the one hand, "beautiful and extraordinary", and on the other, particularly 'fragile'"* (DEL BIAGGIO 2010: 141). Subsequently, the trend of increasing attention towards sustainable development was also used by various actors, in order to create transnational initiatives (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015: 6). DEL BIAGGIO (2010: 142) names three groups of actors, which were and are crucial for the making of the common identity:

- the scientists and Alpine NGOs which identify the Alpine region as such.
- the local leaders and the promoters of the pan-Alpine initiatives who contribute to communicating a certain image of the Alps and its related projects.
- and finally, the population, which is supposed to act in the name of a pan-Alpine consciousness.

After the foundation for a transnational Alpine territory had been laid mainly by the AlpCon and its related institutions, the EU did step on the board as an important catalyst for promoting and supporting transnational projects (DEL BIAGGIO 2010: 142). Taking all of this together, the combination of local Actors and Networks with the administrative and financial as well as practical support by the EU has led to a strong pan-Alpine institutionalization. DEBARBIEUX et al. (2015: 9) therefore describe that *"the current phase in the institutionalization of European massifs is the combined outcome of national experiences, a supportive global mountain agenda and repertoire of scientific discourse, and the diversification of mountain promoters."*

FIG. 9 shows the concept of the two-fold impetus of pan-Alpine institutionalism, as introduced by DEL BIAGGIO (2009). The institutionalism of the region is therefore driven simultaneously by a bottom-up and a top-down process, both of which are driven by the efforts of, on the one hand, (NG-)organisations, mainly related to the Alpine convention and CIRPA, on the other hand by EU-institutions. The two strands are held together by the common goal of all institutions, to achieve a more sustainable development of the Region (e.g. ALPINE CONVENTION 2022;

EUSALP 2016; INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2021). A central role in this regard comes to CIPRA, which not only co-initiated the formation of the Alpine Convention, but today also functions as a connecting point between many associations. The European Macro-regional *EUSALP*, which, of course, was not part of the original concept of DEL BIAGGIO (2009), as it was only established in 2015, takes an important role as connecting point between the two sides. Consequently, the notion of “*the Alps as a region*” is driven both from bottom up, by local initiatives and actors, as well as top down, all being united by a common goal.

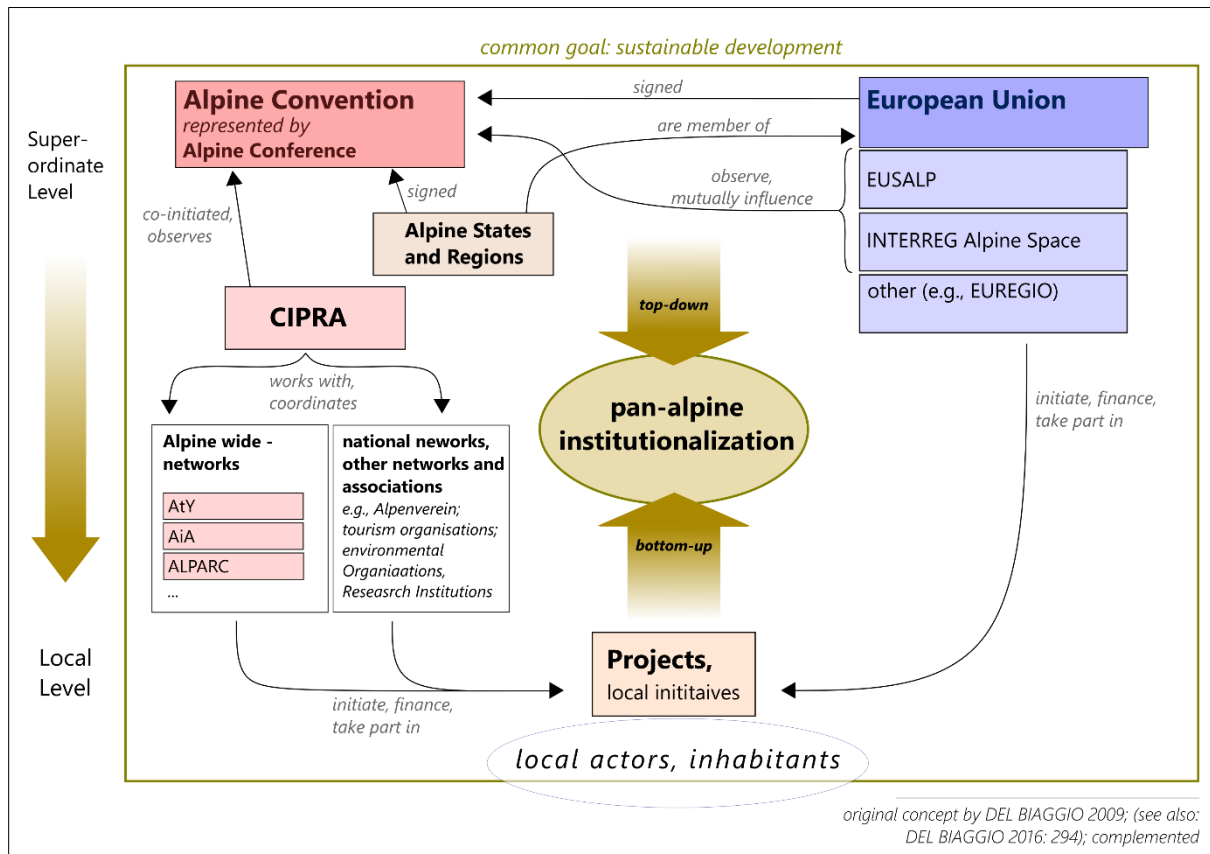


Figure 9: Illustration of the two-fold impetus of pan-Alpine institutionalization after DEL BIAGGIO (2009: 99ff.), own complements. (Alliance in the Alps 2022; Alpine Convention 2022a; AtY 2022; CIPRA 2022a; CIPRA 2022b; Del Blaggio 2016; Del Biaggio 2011; Del Biaggio 2010; EUSALP 2016; Haßlacher 2014; Interreg Alpine Space 2021; Staudigl 2013).

2.4.2 National states

The Alpine perimeter consists of the states of Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Slovenia, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and, depending on the definition, also Monaco. While the Alpine region, as described above, is now considered as a highly transnational region, national states still play a key role. Not at last, of course, since it is due to the national law to implement transnationally agreed policies. It is further noted by DEL BIAGGIO (2011: 126) that “*the administrative, political and ideological structures of the networks and their members do not completely detach from the national level*”.

While protected nature reserves have been founded in all Alpine countries from the mid-late 19th century onwards (GLOERSEN et al. 2013), the first examples of the definition and delineation of mountain areas in public policies can be found in national initiatives from the 1920s to the 1960s (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015). The specific needs of mountain areas, particularly in terms of

agriculture, indicated the need for precise types of funding, for which demarcations of mountain space were necessary. Following this, from the 1960s onwards, the paradigm shifted towards a more project orientated approach, wherein specific areas were demarcated (Italy: *comunità montane*; Switzerland: *Bergregionen*; France: *massifs*) and selected for specific development projects (IBID 2015). DEBARBIEUX et al. (2015: 1197) see Italy, France and Switzerland as the countries that “*have given most attention to institutionalizing mountain regions in policy development and implementation*”.

The administrative differences between the countries are still regarded as one of the major obstacles for transnational cooperation (DEL BIAGGIO 2009; see CH. 2.3.4.3). The different national states vary in subjects like the degree of federal power (federal states like Austria, Germany, Switzerland opposed to centralized states like France and Slovenia), the number of administrative levels, differences in which levels are responsible for which laws or the level of public participation in planning (NARED et al. 2015). Nevertheless, especially since many countries have joined the EU or EU-related programs, the cooperation has become easier.

While transnational agreements like the AlpCon or EU-Contracts are usually signed by the national governments, also regional and municipal councils play an important role in Alpine spatial planning. Initiatives such as “ARGE Alp” or “Alpen-Adria”, which are some of the first Alpine trans-border cooperations, were agreed on by neighbouring regions, rather than states (DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015). This is a trend, which is further emphasized by the EU-concept of *Regionalisation*, which aims to create trans-border initiatives from regions, independent of national administrations (CHILLA and STREIFENEDER 2018).

2.4.3 Alpine Convention and Alpine Conference

The AlpCon was the first Alpine-wide legal agreement for sustainable development within the whole Alpine perimeter (CHURCH 2020; DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015; ESSL and SCHMID 2018; WOLF 2016). Being a treaty by international law, it was signed by all eight Alpine states and the EU (which, however, only takes part via its member states; CHURCH 2020) and consists of a total of eight protocols and two “additional protocols”, which aim to formulate specific measures that are to be implemented by the member countries (ALPINE CONVENTION 1991b). While the original convention had been signed and ratified by all members by 2000, consisting of 89 statements (“*Erwägungsgründe*”; ALPINE CONVENTION 1991b; ALPINE CONVENTION 1989), none of the protocols has yet been ratified by all members (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022e). The AlpCon is a horizontal (as there is no authority above the national level) and integral agreement, meaning it covers a wide variety of thematic issues (as opposed to sectoral conventions like *Helsinki* or *Barcelona*) (CHURCH 2020). It is highly polycentric and multipolar, as the power is shared equally between its members, with even microstates like Liechtenstein holding significant power (CHURCH 2020).

The main goal of the AlpCon is to promote sustainable life in the Alps by “*safeguarding ecosystems, cultural identities, heritage and traditions*” (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022a). Climate change is considered as the “*overarching issue*” (IBID 2022a), while also the implementation of the SDGs is a major concern (IBID 2022a; 2016). The convention relies strongly on the principles of cooperation and information between the contract members (CHURCH 2020; WOLF 2016). Support in the implementation of its goals is provided by various lower-level networks connected to it, like AiA, ALPARC or AtY (WOLF 2016).

The protocols of the convention form the Framework for laws, which are to be implemented by national (or sub-national) legislation. From the original twelve priorities stated (ALPINE CONVENTION 1991b), eight have been transferred into protocols, while two more (water; population and culture) have been subject to own ministerial declarations. The other two, Air quality and waste management, have not yet been approached individually. However, Air quality is the specific subject of the latest *Report on the state of the Alps*.

While these protocols touch a variety of topics, the implementation concerns different levels of government, for example in Austria, as laws of spatial planning are passed by the state ("*Bundesland*") level (ALPINE CONVENTION 2016; BUBJÄGER 2010). While the contract aims to push new legislation, as well aiming to be considered within existing legislation (WOLF 2016), it also acts as a foundation, which can be legally enforced, as BUBJÄGER (2010) describes by the example of Austria. There, he describes the famous case of the "*Mutterer Alm*", where the permission to expand a ski field in an environmentally sensible region was overturned on the basis of the protocol on soil conservation. As the author points out though, cases like this are very rare.

Meeting once every two years, the *Conference of the contracting parties (Alpine Conference; AC)* forms the highest body of the convention. The presidency, currently enacted by Switzerland, shifts every two years between contract partners. The *permanent committee*, on the other hand, acts as the executive organ, meeting twice a year and being responsible for the implementation of its goals. Additionally, a permanent secretary, situated in Innsbruck and Bolzano, has been set up. (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022b; 2016)

Furthermore, the *compliance committee* of the AC is responsible for monitoring "*the compliance of the Contracting Parties with their commitments under the Alpine Convention and its Protocols*" (IBID 2022f). This compliance committee does, however, not have any legal power to punish violations of contract, but builds on the "*publicity effect*" (WOLF 2016: 721), when pointing out violations of the contract. (SIMON 2017)

Besides all this, the Alpine Conference also publishes a "*Multi-Annual Work Programme*" (MAP) as well as promoting and taking part in projects, doing research and publishing reports, such as the *Report on the state of the Alps*, the latest of which was published in 2021, focusing on Air quality (ALPINE CONVENTION 2021). The current MAP (IBID 2017b) focuses on the following six objectives:

- 1) Focusing on people and culture.
- 2) Taking action on climate change.
- 3) Conserving and valuing biodiversity and landscape.
- 4) Greening the economy.
- 5) Promoting sustainable transport.
- 6) Playing a leading role in EUSALP.

In addition to the protocols, the AC has also published six "*ministerial declarations*", which act as addition to the former. In the following, the protocols and declarations are summarized. Each of the protocols follows the same structure, starting with a general statement, followed by measures of implementation, observation, and evaluation. While hereafter only a short summary is given, each of the protocols and declarations includes a wide range of measures that

are to be taken. The full list of these can be looked up on the website of the Alpine Convention⁴.

Table 2: Summary of the eight protocols of the Alpine Convention. (ALPINE CONVENTION 2000; ALPINE CONVENTION 1998a; ALPINE CONVENTION 1998b; ALPINE CONVENTION 1998c; ALPINE CONVENTION 1996; ALPINE CONVENTION 1994a; ALPINE CONVENTION 1994b; ALPINE CONVENTION 1994c)

Topic	Year	about	not ratified by
Spatial planning and sustainable development	1994	As limited space in Alps is usable, the conflict of utilisation is ever-present. Usages like living, recreation, nature reserves, tourism and energy production need to be coordinated. The aim lies on <i>"sustainable development"</i> of space, while recognizing <i>"the specific needs of the Alpine territory"</i> .	CH; EU
Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation	1994	The objective is <i>"to lay down international laws, [...], to protect, care for and, to the extent necessary, restore nature and landscape [...]"</i> . All parties must present a <i>"report on the current situation of nature protection and landscape conservation"</i> , <i>"three years after this Protocol comes into force"</i> .	CH; EU
Mountain farming	1994	The multifaceted significance of mountain farming is recognized. the protocol aims to <i>"preserve and promote mountain farming which suits local conditions and is environmentally compatible"</i> , while <i>"conserving the beauty and recreational value of nature [...] and cultural life [...]"</i> .	CH; MC
Mountain forests	1996	Mountain forest have a large economic value, act as protection against natural hazards, absorb CO ₂ , have recreational value, are a source of renewable material and are near-natural habitats. The aim is to <i>"preserve the mountain forests as a near-natural habitat, [...] develop them or increase their extent and improve their stability"</i> .	CH; MC
Soil Conservation	1998	Soil is a characteristic element of nature and landscape and an integral part of the ecological balance, which is why it <i>"shall be preserved in a sustainable manner"</i> .	CH
Energy	1998	Contracting Parties are to optimise and harmonize their energy distribution systems, while limiting the impact on the environment and making wider use of renewable sources.	CH; MC
Tourism	1998	While tourism is one of the most important economic sectors, it is also recognized that a large proportion of Alpine municipalities do not have tourism at all. The aim is to <i>"contribute to sustainable development [...] by encouraging environmentally-friendly tourism"</i> .	CH

⁴ [Alpcnv.org/en/home/convention/protocols-declarations](http://alpcnv.org/en/home/convention/protocols-declarations)

		<i>[...] which take the interests of both the local population and tourists into account."</i>	
Transport	2000	The parties are to <i>"pursue a sustainable transport policy"</i> . They shall <i>"refrain from constructing any new, large-capacity roads for transAlpine transport"</i> while developing <i>"user-friendly, environmentally adapted public transport systems"</i> and <i>"developing the major transAlpine railway routes"</i> , especially in tourist destinations.	MC, CH

Table 3: The six ministerial declarations of the Alpine Convention. (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020a; ALPINE CONVENTION 2020b; ALPINE CONVENTION 2019; ALPINE CONVENTION 2016b; ALPINE CONVENTION 2006a; ALPINE CONVENTION 2006b)

Topic	Year	Topic
Population and Culture	2006	The need of a <i>"people-centred, sustainable development policy that focuses on the needs, wishes and opinions of the people who live in the Alpine area"</i> is stated, focusing on <i>"equality of opportunity"</i> , in the face of the ongoing demographic change.
Climate Change	2006	It is recognized that <i>"climate change particularly affects the Alpine Area"</i> , the declaration commits a 2°-goal. Measures to Avoid and Adapt climate change are presented.
Fostering a Sustainable Economy in the Alps	2016	The goal to <i>"foster a sustainable economy"</i> and <i>"increase action on mitigation and adaptation towards an ideal goal of overall climate neutrality in the Alps by 2050"</i> is reiterated, while no new measures or objectives are presented.
Climate-neutral and Climate-resilient Alps 2050	2019	Concern of the current status of climate change, especially in the Alps, is raised. The goal of <i>"climate-neutrality and climate-resilience"</i> Alps by 2050 is reiterated, committing to the 2015 Paris agreement.
Integrated and sustainable water management in the Alps	2020	Following results from the <i>Water Management Platform 2009-2019</i> , eleven commitments are stated, including i.a. <i>"improvement [...] and restauration of natural water courses"</i> , <i>"adaption to climate change"</i> while <i>"considering"</i> the changed circumstances in the face of climate change, and <i>"continue [...] transnational cooperation on water management issues"</i>
Protection of Mountain Biodiversity and its Promotion at International Level	2020	The <i>"importance of mountain ecosystems in global biodiversity conservation"</i> is <i>"underlined"</i> . Contracting parties are requested to eight points, including <i>"Reinforce the implementation of the [existing] Protocols of the Alpine Convention [...]"</i> , <i>"Consider [...] the development of an action plan for mountain biodiversity [...]"</i> and <i>"support the existing Alpine protected lands [...]"</i> .

While the protocols of the Alpine convention offer a very comprehensive set of goals, covering most of the pressing matters in the Alpine space to date, criticism has been raised that they are essentially *"just goals"*, not being precise enough and therefore can often not be applied

(BUBJÄGER 2010; WOLF 2016). Additionally, as BUBJÄGER (2010) points out, infringements of the law are often not checked and therefore not punished.

Looking at the formulation of the measures suggested by the protocols, both the strictness and the ambition of these vary. Very rarely, “hard” measures are suggested (WOLF 2016). The protocol on sustainable development (ALPINE CONVENTION 1994a), for example, states very specific measures, such as requiring the *“development plans [...] at the most appropriate territorial level”* to include specific measures to the *“limiting of holiday homes”*. On the other hand, further down, for a couple of measures, the contracting parties are only required *“to examine to what extent it is possible, in compliance with their respective national laws”* to do a certain thing, which may, of course, be seen as non-binding. Only rarely, specific schedules, such as the one in the “Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation protocol” (see TAB. 2; ALPINE CONVENTION 1994b) are stated. Similarly, while some protocols, like the one on “Transport” (IBID 2000) seem to be very ambitious, prohibiting any construction of new large capacity-roads, the same is weakened significantly by a set of exceptions stated right beneath (see also: WOLF 2016).

Much the same may be said about the additional declarations. While they take up important issues that are not covered by the protocols, the formulation is often vague, especially visible in the declaration on mountain biodiversity (ALPINE CONVENTION 2020d; see TAB. 3). While little interpretation or evaluation on the strength of the declarations has been provided in the literature, it seems reasonable to suggest that they, similar to the protocols, aim to provide recommendations, rather actual legislation. However, they still provide a valuable instrument to react to changing circumstances, as for example the development of the *Paris agreement*.

The convention is further weakened by the fact that not all members have, in fact, ratified the protocols. Most notably, Switzerland has not ratified any, as they argue that they practice a *“implementation without ratification approach”* (CHURCH 2020: 115), which, of course, is rather vague. WOLF 2016) further points out that guidelines, such as the ones on agricultural politics, in fact, have little weight, as the Convention is not able to provide any funds themselves. Therefore, countries are bound to oblige to EU norms, which are connected to the huge agricultural subsidy connected to it, rather than the AlpCon.

Taking all this into account, the conclusion of WOLF (2016), stating that the strength of the convention lies in fact not in influencing national law, but in building international cooperations and networks between the Alpine actors, seems very reasonable.

2.4.4 CIPRA

The organisation CIPRA (*Commission Internationale pour la Protection des Alpes*) is an autonomous, non-profit organisation (CIPRA 2021a), which was founded in 1952 and acts as a umbrella organisation for many networks and associations in the Alps, as well as initiating and taking part in projects themselves and publishing reports and research (IBID 2021b). It consists of eight subsidiary organisations, one for each Alpine state, except Monaco, plus an individual one for South Tyrol. It aims to create a region *“that is climate-neutral and nature-positive, with landscapes that ensure quality of life while respecting ecological boundaries”* (IBID 2021b: 1). In order to achieve this, CIPRA tries to *“communicate in several languages, providing information to the public”, “exert pressure on policymakers, authorities and industry”, “participate in politically relevant processes”, “bring people, projects and organisations together”, “develop and implement*

projects", while acting as an "umbrella organisation [...] [that] represents people and organisations dedicated to life in the Alps" (IBID 2021b: 1). Doing all this, they hope to "encourage others to take action" (CIPRA 2022c).

As much criticism has stated that the AlpCon has been a top-down mechanism to create a connected Alpine region, not involving the actual population, CIPRA has founded or initiated several organisations that work on different fields, to involve the public and create bottom-up mechanisms (see CH. 2.4.1.2: two-fold impetus of pan-Alpine institutionalism).

CIPRA is important to this work for various reasons. For one, it was one of the main initiators of the Alpine Convention, on the other hand, it acts as the secretary if AtY nowadays.

2.4.5 Alpine Town of the Year

2.4.5.1 Organization

Alpine Town of the Year (AtY) was founded in 1997, as a project by local actors in the town of Villach, which, in turn, was nominated as the first Alpine Town of the Year for two years itself. Stimulated by the Idea of the "European Capitals of Culture", the project was originally to be named "Capital of the Alps" ("Alpenhauptstadt"), before it was settled on the current name. Right from the beginning, the association was in close cooperations with other trans-Alpine networks such as ARGE Alp, ProVitaAlpina and CIRPA (ATY 2020; LEEB 2022).

The broader reason for this was to provide ways to implement the AlpCon, which had been signed a couple of years prior. The aim of the project has from the beginning been to achieve "harmony between the preservation of the unique natural landscapes, economic activities and urban life by raising "awareness of politicians and citizens alike for the sustainable development of their territories" (ATY 2020).

The association gained momentum when in 1999 Belluno and in 2000 Maribor joined the project, making it a trans-national network of cities. In the following years, the admittance of Bad Reichenhall (2001), Gap (2002) and Herisau (2003) meant that all six countries, which are part of the network today, had one city in. In 2003, the secretary, formerly in Villach, was moved to CIPRA. 2006 and the project was legally transferred to be an "association" by Liechtenstein law, starting in 2011 to initiate their own projects. (ATY 2020; LEEB 2022)

Today, AtY is a non-profit association with seat in Sonthofen (Germany). It is funded about half-half by member fees and fundings for specific projects. Its spendings go, on the one hand, into administration (50%), on the other hand, into internal communication and Assemblies (33%), Projects (13%) and public work (4%) (see: FIG. 10).

It has committed itself to five major goals (ATY 2019):

- 1) Strengthen the Alpine awareness ("identity")
- 2) Involve the public ("participation")

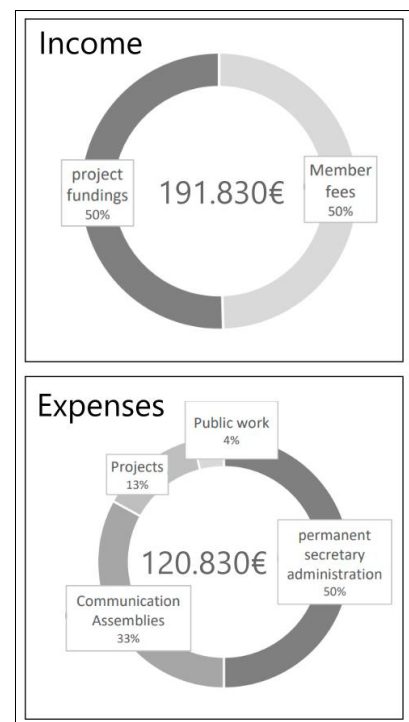


Figure 10: AtY: Income and Expenses accounting year 2021. (AtY: 2021)

- 3) Build bridges to the region ("*function*")
- 4) Shape the future in a sustainable way ("*vision*")
- 5) Extend collaborations ("*cooperation*")

The association aims to do this by forming a network of municipalities, as the "*municipality is a central level in the implementation of sustainable politics*". It further aims to be a "*Role model for other cities*", which is to be achieved through "*intensive public relations work*", as they pledge to "*construct our politics in a way that it is publicly visible and achieves a broad public appeal*". (ATY 2019: 2,3)

Today the association is made of the member's assembly, the board, the jury and the permanent secretary, the last being enacted by CIPRA. Each Town, which has once been named "Alpine Town of the Year" is eligible to become a voting member of the association, which includes paying the annual member fees. To date, 19 of the elected 23 towns are members of the association.

While the board, which is made of three to five mayors of voting members, elected by the members every two years, is the executive organ of the association, the jury is made of external experts, currently three, which are responsible for, on the hand, consulting the association in various topics, and, on the other hand, proposing the next possible Alpine Town of the Year (ATY 2019). Every town, which lies within the perimeter of the Alpine Convention, is able to apply for the title and is then selected by the jury based on its fitting to the goals of the association.

2.4.5.2 Members

The title „Alpine Town of the Year" has to date been awarded to a total of 23 cities, as can be seen in FIG 11 and 12. The majority of AT are located south of the Alpine main ridge, the most in Italy. While the first six AT have been awarded rather evenly over the different countries, nowadays, a clear disparity is seen, with Germany, Austria and Switzerland each only holding two cities.

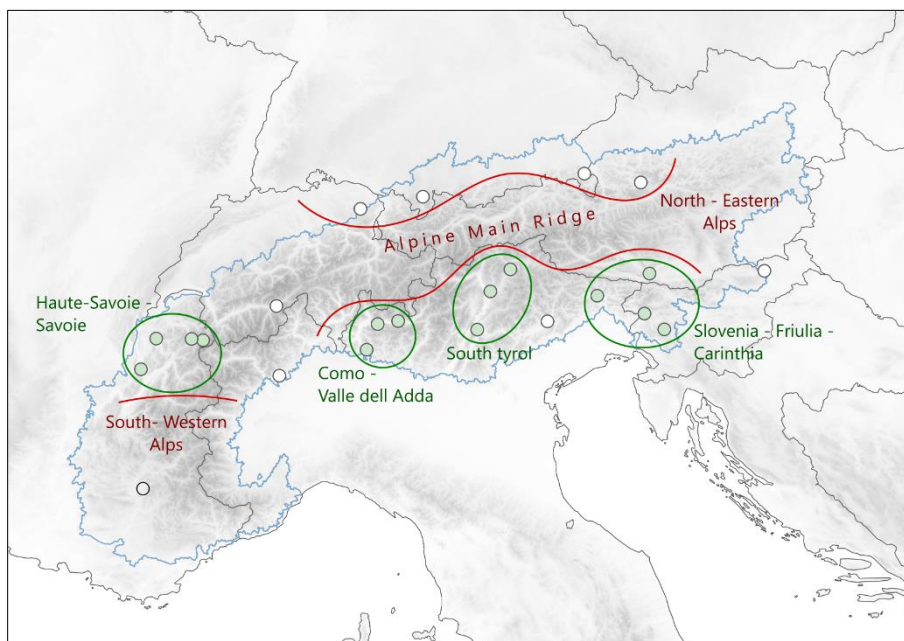


Figure 11:
Clusters of AT
(green), with areas
of relative neglect
in red.

Furthermore, regional clustering is seen, especially in the east of France, with Annecy, Passy and Chamonix all being located in the Department *Haute-Savoie*, in the Italian region around *Lago di Como* (Lecco, Morbegno and Sondrio), the *Trentino-Alto-Adige/Südtirol* (Trento, Bolzano-Bozen, Brixen-Bressanone) and the west of Slovenia (Tolmin, Idrija). On the other hand, large parts north of the Alpine Main ridge, including the *Rheintal*, *Inntal* and *Ennstal*, eastern Austria and the whole French and Italian southern Alps (with the exception of Gap) do not have any AT (FIG. 11). (ATY 2022b)



Figure 12: The 23 "Alpine Towns of the Year". Red: perimeter of the Alpine Convention.

In the following, the 23 cities that have been awarded "Alpine Town of the Year" are listed. For each (with the exception of Villach and Maribor), the Jury of the association has published a statement as to why the towns are awarded the titles and which areas they focus on.

Table 4: The 23 Alpine Towns of the Year including the Jury decision, as to why they have been nominated as such. Jury decision is condensed (see ATY 2022b).

Name	cou.	Year	Jury decision	Nr. of projects
Villach	AUT	1997	-	1
Belluno	ITA	1999	"The only mountain province in the Veneto region to have taken important initiatives at national (Italian) level so as to preserve Alpine traditions and identity"	4
Maribor	SLO	2000	-	-
Bad Reichenhall	GER	2001	Function within the Alpine region, participation, relations with surrounding area.	-

Gap	FRA	2002	Pursuing <i>urban development goals that are in line with the Alpine Convention</i> and taking <i>"responsibility for its regional surroundings."</i>	-
Herisau	SUI	2003	Respect for traditions, symbiosis between agriculture and high-tech.	1
Trento	ITA	2004	<i>"Trento is the Alpine town par excellence"</i> ; Rich cultural heritage, transalpine cooperation.	4
Sonthofen	GER	2005	Great emphasis on Participation. The title is also to be seen as <i>"an incentive for further efforts by the town"</i> .	4
Chambéry	FRA	2006	Cooperation with surrounding area, promoting sustainable development.	3
Sondrio	ITA	2007	<i>"Protection of nature and the landscape"</i> , especially the characteristic cultural landscape.	-
Brig-Glis	SUI	2008	Regional cooperation and <i>"abandoning of old rivalries"</i> , in the context of sustainable development projects.	1
Bolzano - Bozen	ITA	2009	Air quality measures, the <i>"climate pact"</i> , strengthening of the city-mountain connection.	2
Bad Aussee	AUT	2010	energy supply through biomass, public transport, <i>"active resistance of the town to the construction of a hydropower plant"</i> , function as <i>"mediator"</i> to the surrounding.	1
Idrija	SLO	2011	Strategic location between Alps and Slovenian karst area, creation of the <i>"Geo-Park"</i> , <i>"extension of the cycle path network"</i> , <i>"decentralised sewage treatment plants"</i> .	8
Annecy	FRA	2012	Water protection, regional importance, energy efficiency, waste management, urban biodiversity, public transport.	3
Lecco	ITA	2013	Mobility behaviour awareness, recycling, sustainable tourism, Alpine tradition.	1
Chamonix	FRA	2015	Climate-energy-plan, landscape protection, participation.	2
Tolmin	SLO	2016	Valorisation of cultural heritage, organic farming, respectful tourism, reinforcing Alpine identity.	4
Tolmezzo	ITA	2017	Participation, youth participation, traditional handicraft, respectful and sustainable tourism.	1
Brixen – Bressanone	ITA	2018	Location between town and mountain, <i>"implementing Alpine convention"</i> ; <i>"future-orientated concepts"</i> .	1
Morbegno	ITA	2019	Implementation of the Alpine convention, leading town for the surrounding areas.	1

Biella	ITA	2021	Valorisation of the Alpine natural landscape, cultural heritage, water protection, nature-based tourism, sustainable urban development, public transport.	-
Passy	FRA	2022	Several sustainability-project including energy, air quality and tourism; cultural heritage; strategic geographical position	-

While the jury decision show different degrees of precision, sometimes pointing out specific projects, while in other cases, only general things such as *"promoting sustainable development"* or *"future-orientated concepts"*, still a number of re-appearing factors that are especially important can be derived. Besides classic sustainability topics, such as mobility, sustainable tourism and nature protection, also active measure for promoting participation, especially youth participation, are valued, while also the position of the town, ideally in a strategic position between different regions or landscapes, is highlighted. Furthermore, the jury in same cases also emphasizes the goal of the title to further promote sustainable measures in the future.

2.4.5.3 Projects

Since 2011, AtY takes part in projects in the context of the EU or the AlpCon and initiates projects itself, of which the member towns are encouraged to take part in. As can be seen in TAB. 4, the degree to which towns take part in the projects varies strongly. So far, a total of twelve projects have been done, three of which are briefly explained in the following to give a broad understanding of how these work. (ATY 2022c)

Climate Action in Alpine Towns

This project, initiated and funded by the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial planning (ARE), was developed in the context of the Swiss Presidency of the AlpCon and is also part of the Territorial Agenda of the EU, thus forming a connection between AtY, the AlpCon and the EU. The aim is to encourage individual towns to implement concrete Actions on climate change in urban environment, which may act as examples to other towns. This includes for example projects like

- Managing conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians in the city centre to promote active mobility (Sonthofen).
- Re-vitalizing former under-ground watercourses in the city centre (Brig-Glis).
- Re-greening and re-vitalization of former mining areas (Idrija).

The project is set to be completed in 2022 and will be summarized by a scientific report (ALPINE CONVENTION 2022g; ATY 2022d; TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2030 2022).

Alps 2030

Financed by Erasmus+, this project aims to raise awareness of the 17 SDGs, especially among young people. Together with CIPRA and three municipalities from Liechtenstein, four AT worked for 2 years on small scale project. The project included young people travelling to different places to exchange ideas and work together on projects. Alps 2030 was finished in March 2022 with final project presentations by the individual towns, which are, however, not all publicly available. (ATY 2022e; own observation - the author took part in the final event in Belluno in March 2022.)

Tour des Villes

Tackling the challenge of converting disused buildings and sites in cities, four AtY, in cooperation with CIPRA and ARE (project sponsor), aimed to develop individual projects in their respective towns to provide solutions for sustainable settlement. The projects included:

- Idrija: Reviving historical houses of former mining workers.
- Sonthofen: Re-utilisation of the "*Jägerkaserne*", a disused barracks site in the town centre
- Tolmezzo: Conversion of the "*Cantore barracks*", including a 18th century Palazzo.

The project was concluded by a report (CIPRA et al. 2019), an Online Photo Book⁵, as well as a card box.

2.4.6 Other NG-associations and clubs

In the following, a selection of further networks active in the Alps is given. Of the following networks, all but the ARGE Alp, which is closely connected to the AlpCon though, have been initiated by the Alpine Convention and subsequently CIPRA.

Table 5: Selection of important NG-networks in the Alpine region.

Abbr.	Name	found.	Responsibility	Member states
ARGE Alp	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenraum	1972 / 1989	Solve common economic, social and environmental problems together with as little as possible administrative work.	AUT, GER, SUI, ITA
PVA	Pro Vita Alpina International	1972	Cultural activities such as funding of cultural initiatives, projects, "everyday-culture" and common history	Undefined; "Alpine region"
ALPARC	Alpine Network of Protected Areas	1995	Was founded to help implement the "Nature conservation and landscape management" of the Alpine convention. <i>"Exchange of expertise, techniques and methods among the managers of all the large, protected areas in the Alps"</i> .	AUT, GER, FRA, SLO, SUI, ITA
AiA	Alliance in the Alps	1997	Aims to protect the environment, make communities more attractive economically, strengthen the quality of life and promote the goals of the Alpine Convention through connecting municipalities. Acts as an association of 316 individual.	AUT, GER, ITA, FRA, SLO, SUI, LIE
ISCAR	International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps	1999	Promote, stimulate and coordinate interdisciplinary research on the Alps and the transfer of scientific knowledge to policymakers and the general public.	AUT, GER, ITA, FRA, SLO, SUI

⁵ www.Alpenstaedte.org/tourdesvilles

2.4.7 EU-related Actors

The second major transnational player in the Alpine region is the EU, with its various institutions. The most important of these are the Interreg Alpine Space program, which was started in 2000 and the EUSALP-Strategy, implemented in 2015. In addition to this, the EU also funds a number of transnational initiatives, which do not involve the whole of the Alps, but connect countries, transborder regions or inter-regional cooperation.

2.2.7.1 INTERREG Alpine Space

The INTERREG Alpine Space Program was first introduced in 2000 under the “Interreg IIB” programme. It is currently in its fourth funding period, lasting from 2021-2027. (INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2021)

It covers a significantly larger area than the Alpine convention (see FIG 1, CH. 2.1), even more so since the perimeter has been adjusted for the latest funding period to align with the EUSALP area (IBID 2022b). The goal of the programme is to *“foster the integration of sustainable economic development, societal wellbeing and the preservation of its outstanding nature”* by *“bringing together stakeholders from different areas, sectors and levels”* (IBID 2022b: 10).

Being funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), as part of the EU Cohesion politics, the program is awarded a total of 107mio for the current period (IBID 2022b: 107). With that, it supports and funds *“projects across borders”* and facilitates *“joint trans-national solutions”* (INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2022b: 10) on different levels, including for example the AtY-Project GaYA. Since the introduction of EUSALP, Interreg Alpine Space also aims to *“contribute to the goals of EUSALP”*, as it is also part of all EUSALP Action groups. On top of that, it also holds observer status to the AlpCon, with underlines their close cooperation as well (IBID 2022b: 10).

2.2.7.2 EUSALP

The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, short EUSALP, was introduced in 2015, after a common strategy for the Region had been called for years.

It is the fourth European Macro-Regional Strategy (MRS), which are strategies aimed to provide an additional level between pan-EU and national. These strategies commit to three “Nos”, no (new) legislation, funding, or institutions, meaning they aim to act as a connecting point between existing structures. This seems especially promising on the Alpine Region, as the area is already *“institutionally thick”*. (CHILLA and STREIFENEDER 2018)

The core of the programme are the 9 action groups, which are the *“drivers of day-to-day implementation”* (EUSALP 2022b). These action groups consist of a wide variety of actors, including actors that are involved in other networks as well. Similar to the former, EUSALP also aims to *“balance development and protection”* (EUSALP 2022a).

2.5 Network theory

2.5.1 Elements and terminology

2.5.1.1 Terminology

Network

A network from scientific perspective is, most generally, a system made of *points* (also: *nodes*; *vertices*; *actors*) and *lines* (also: *edges*; *arcs*; *ties*; *links*), which connect them to each other. While there are many different types of networks in all different subjects of science, this basic layout is what they all have in common. (BALLAS et al. 2017; BARTHÉLEMY 2011; BEHRINGER 2003; DOROGOVTSĚV and MENDES 2013; LIGHT and MOODY 2021a; OKABE and SUGIHARA 2012) The crucial difference between a sheer graph of lines and a network is the combination of those two elements (FIG. 13; BALLAS et al. 2017: 72). The networks can be situated in geographic space, two-dimensional or three-dimensional, in virtual space, often in the internet, or act as methodological concepts to investigate abstract matters. (BARTHÉLEMY 2011; OKABE and SUGIHARA 2012).

Network theory

Networks can be used both as a theoretic concept, as many theories on the workings of networks exist, and as a tool, as in a collection of methods to solve network-related issues, often connected to GIS (LIGHT and MOODY 2021a). While in this work, the theoretic concept of network is used and therefore explained in more detail, LIGHT and MOODY (2021a) offer a broad collection of methodological applications. BORGATTI and HALGIN (2011) further distinguish between “*network theory*” and “*theory of networks*”. The former thus describes “*the mechanisms and processes that interact with network structures to yield certain outcomes for individuals and groups*” (IBID: 1168) while the latter are “*processes that determine why networks have the structures they do*” (IBID: 1168).

Spatial vs. non-spatial network

A spatial network is one where the nodes are situated in a geographic metric, however, the links do not have to. For example, looking at social networks, the nodes are at a specific location in space (although they can move, of course), while the link between them can be virtual, and therefore independent of the geographic space between them. (BARTHÉLEMY 2011)

Another important distinction is the one between *planar* and *non-planar networks*, planar meaning that the network is situated on the ground, which means that generally two links that cross each other will also intersect (BARTHÉLEMY 2011; OKABE and SUGIHARA 2012). Most transport networks are, of course, planar (with the exception of air travel), while many social networks do not fall under this category, which comes with a specific set of characteristics and rules. Crucial to the concept of spatial networks is distance, as connections tend to be weaker with larger distance (BARTHÉLEMY 2011; SARKAR et al. 2021).

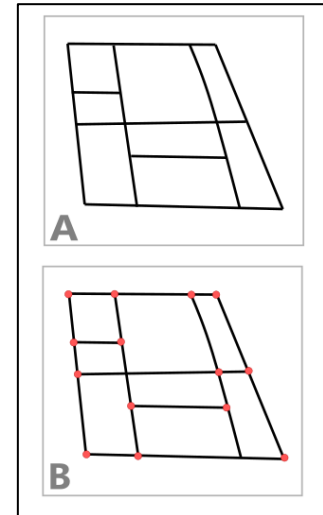


Figure 13: Comparison of a sheer graph (of e.g. a street layout; A) and a network of nodes and links (B). (see BALLAS 2017: 72).

Social network (SN)

Social networks are not to be confused with “social media”, which are only a type of these. While social networks generally cover networks of social interactions, with nodes being individuals or groups of people, and links the relationships between them (FUHSE 2015: 15; YE and ANDRIS 2021), the definition of what a social network exactly is, varies according to different theories (see CH. 2.5.2). It can be said though that SN are not by definition all networks in social science, as other network types may also be used here, but they are the most common (FUHSE 2021). BALLAS et al. (2017) point out that SN, although functioning differently, follow the same principal rules as other networks, for example when it comes to travelling through the respective network. *“Distance or routing in the case of a social network is not usually concerned with physical space, but rather how many people information travels through [...] before reaching the destination.”* (BALLAS et al. 2017: 69). Naturally, the analysis of social networks in all sorts of contexts is called *Social Network Analysis (SNA)*.

Policy networks (PN)

A special form of social networks, spatial or non-spatial, are policy networks. These *“describe the patterns of interaction among actors working a particular policy system or decision-making process, in reference to a particular type of relationship such as information exchange or political coordination”* (HENRY 2011: 361). They can include political as well as non-political individuals or organisations. Investigating the connections and interactions of such systems through a network approach has become increasingly popular in recent years (BEHRINGER 2003; HENRY 2011; LEIFELD and SCHNEIDER 2012), with such networks including also *“Transnational city networks”*. Policy networks are further discussed in CH. 2.5.3.

2.5.1.2 Elements of networks

Nodes

Nodes, also referred to as points, vertices or, in social science often, actors, are the connected entities of networks and therefore arguable their central element. Points can be things like single people, groups of people, institutions or cities, but also traffic junctions or even blood vessels (LIGHT and MOODY 2021b; OKABE and SUGIHARA 2012). They can be characterized by their *centrality* (also: *“popularity”*), which is an index measuring the number of other nodes, that they are connected to. It is an important indicator for determining the importance of nodes within networks, especially when it comes to connecting less central points (KADUSHIN 2012; LIGHT and MOODY 2021a).

BORGATTI and EVERETT (2021) differentiate between three types of centralities:

- 1) Walk structure perspective: This perspective sees nodes form paths through networks. A path, by definition, is a line of connected nodes, wherein every node must only appear once. As such, in a finite network, a finite number of possible paths exist. Following this assumption, it can be measured, how many paths go through a node.
- 2) Induced centrality perspective: This measures the extent to which a node contributes to the layout of the graph. The layout of the network can be described by “invariants”, which are structural characteristics (e.g. the number of edges or also the amount of

goods that can be transported through the network). It is then calculated, how the invariant changes, if the node is removed.

- 3) Flow outcomes perspective: It is measured, how long it takes for a good to get to a node, or how many steps does it have to take to get there.

Points also define the dynamism of a network. If points can be switched or off at any time, resulting in varying configurations, a network is called *dynamic* (LIGHT and MOODY 2021b).

Links

Links, or arcs, ties, and lines, connect the points to each other. Types of links within networks include streets, social connections or walking patterns of people, and many more (BARTHÉLEMY 2011; LIGHT and MOODY 2021b; OKABE and SUGIHARA 2012). Links can be directed or not, meaning that the information or good travels only one-way (DOROGOVTSĖV and MENDES 2013) and weighted, meaning that the strength of the connection and its ability to carry goods or information is assigned a value (non-weighted links are called "*binary*") (BAGGIO 2019; LIGHT and MOODY 2021b; OPSAHL et al. 2010). In the case of social connection, LIGHT and MOODY (2021a) describe strong connections as people that spend a lot of time together and share lots of information. While they describe strongly connected people as important when it comes to for example trust, weaker connections may be more likely to share new information. This concept of the "*strength of weak ties*" was first introduced by GRANOVETTER (1973) and basically describes the importance of weak ties, defined as links with low weight, as they are "*are disproportionately likely to be bridges as compared to strong ties, [...]*" (GRANOVETTER 1973: 130).

The *Edge-Complexity* of a network, on the other hand, describes how many layers of information are being transferred. The same nodes can be connected by various different layers of links, for example a network of individuals can explain both their connections via social media and their real-life relations. Such a network is called *multiplex* (LIGHT and MOODY 2021b). Furthermore, edges can link points of different levels with each other, for example a person-to-association or city-to-individual connection is also possible to depict as a network, then called *multiple-mode-network* (IBID 2021b).

Triads

While the most basic form of a network is a so-called *dyad*, two nodes connected by one link (KADUSHIN 2012: 14; LIGHT and MOODY 2021b: 8), the building blocks of any more complex network are *triads*, networks of three points (FIG. 14). As "*the most elementary network in which the form of the network really matters*" (KADUSHIN 2012: 13), triads offer a "*handle for understanding larger networks*" (ibid: 13). KADUSHIN (2012: 24) thus distinguishes between 16

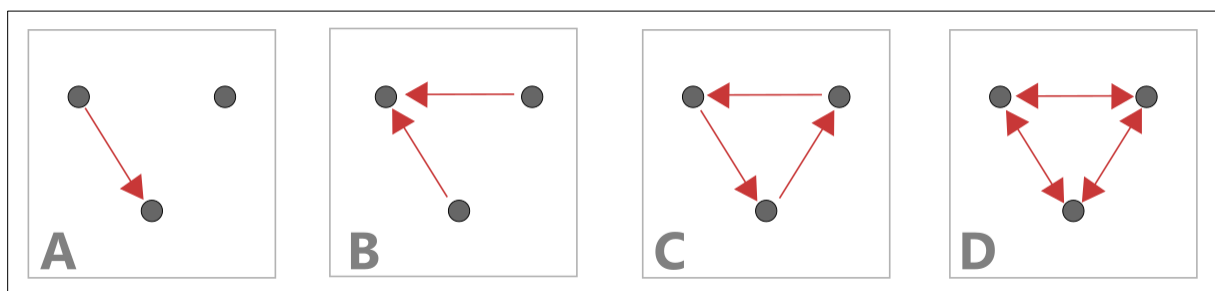


Figure 14: Selection of different types of triads, with each having three nodes with links either directed or non-directed. (see KADUSHIN 2012: 24)

configurations of triads, from which all larger networks can be built. The triads differ in the number of connections between the nodes (0 - 3), which are connected to which, and whether the connections are directed or not, not taking into account weighted links, which would obviously result in an infinite number of possible triads.

FIG. 14 shows a selection of four triads, representing different forms of possible configurations. While the FIG. only shows a selection of 4 triads, it can already be imagined how the configuration of these will influence the network as a whole. As LIGHT and MOODY (2021b: 9) argue, *“these properties have significant implications for the resulting macro-structure. For example, a network without 201 triads [NB: the authors are referring to nodes without undirected links, such as ex. C] in its population means that all relations are within clusters, so the resulting network will be a set of complete cliques”*. This emphasizes the importance of undirected links in a network.

2.5.1.3 Network connectivity

Connectivity is one of the crucial attributes of networks. While the importance of the concept of connectivity is widely accepted (LIGHT and MOODY 2021b), measuring it is not as simple as it seems. One simple way to measure connectivity is *density*, which is calculated by dividing the number of edges by the number of possible edges (KADUSHIN 2012: 28). This, however, may produce a misleading picture, as FIG. 15 suggests. A configuration as seen here is called a *structural hole*, where two major sections of a network are only connected through one node (KADUSHIN 2012: 30). The *density* in this example is high, whereas the connectivity is still arguably low. MOODY and COLEMAN (2015) therefore suggest differentiating between *node connectivity* and *edge-connectivity*. The latter describes how many edges must be removed, in order to disconnect a network, while the former measures how many nodes must be removed. Looking at FIG. 15 it can be seen that, while the edge connectivity is high, the point connectivity is very low, as only one point has to be removed in order to disconnect the network. The authors furthermore argue that *“node connectivity better characterizes the intuitive notion that a cohesive group is held together but not dominated by a single node”* (IBID 2015: 907).

While point cohesion therefore proves to be a superior measuring tool, the authors come to the conclusion that they don't know any *“single detection method that has no arbitrary parameters and can identify real underlying groups with certainty”* (IBID 2015: 911). Subgroups with strong ties within the group, but not to the rest of the network, such as each of the groups in FIG. 15, are called *cliques*. While Cohesion measures the connectedness of the network as a whole, the amount to which one member is integrated into the network through links is called *embeddedness* (LIGHT and MOODY 2021b).

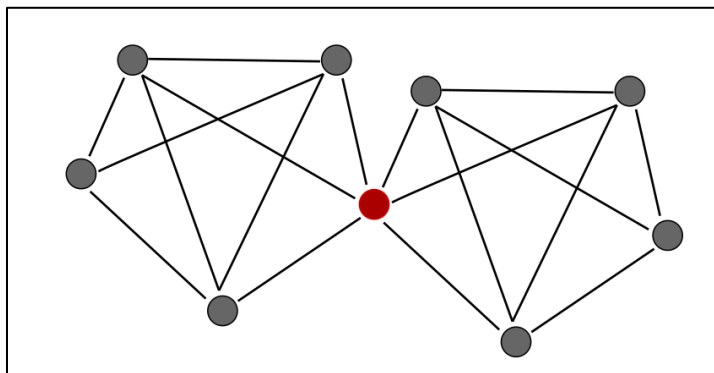


Figure 15: A “structural hole” in a network with low point-connectivity, but high edge-connectivity. (see LIGHT and Moody 2021.)

STADTFELD et al. (2020) propose that the stability of macro-level structures is largely dependent on dynamics on the level of dyads and triads. For this, the authors introduce a set of possible forms of ties, which consist of both positive and negative ties, as they argue that the latter are crucial to the working of networks as well.

FIG. 16 shows the different possibilities of ties, which can be grouped into four main categories. All of these work similar for negative and positive ties, with a mixture also possible (STADTFELD et al. 2020):

	RECIPROCAL	TRANSITIVE	DEGREE POPULAR	HOMOPHILIC
ATTRACTION				
REPULSION				
MIXED (CONFLICTED)				

Figure 16: Different possibilities of ties (blue: positive; red: negative) after STADTFELD 2020.

- 1) **Reciprocity:** Ties between to nodes, where the attraction (positive tie) or the repulsion (negative tie) leads to the respective answer.
- 2) **Transitivity:** It is argued that the attraction of one node with two individual ones is likely to lead to the attraction of these two as well, as in if A & B and B & C are connected, a connection between B & C is also likely to form (described by e.g. WHITE 2012) as "*folding-in*". This is among others due to overlap in interaction opportunities, social preferences and physical space. In the mixed category, a large number of possibilities are conceivable, however, here only the most common are depicted, which are:
 - a. individuals tend to form positive ties to others if there is a third person with whom they both have a conflicted dyad
 - b. individuals tend to form negative ties to others who are in a conflicted dyad with someone who they are positively tied to
 - c. individuals tend to form negative ties to others who are reciprocally positively connected with someone with whom they are in a conflicted dyad
- 3) **Degree popularity** (also: "*matthew effect*", "*preferential attachment*", "*cumulative advantage*"): As one node is "popular" it is likely to attract other nodes as well, or the other way around in the case of repulsion. Similarly, the popularity of one node in a particular clique may lead to repulsion from others.

- 4) **Homophily:** This term refers to the concept that nodes, which are connected within a network, have the tendency to share an over-proportional amount of characteristics. Homophily can appear both by acquired (education, hobbies, etc.) and inherent (age, sex, etc.) attributes. Causes for Homophily are one of the most discussed topics within the field, as it remains unanswered, whether nodes with similar attributes are likely to connect or if the connection of nodes leads to their attributes become more similar. (KADUSHIN 2012)

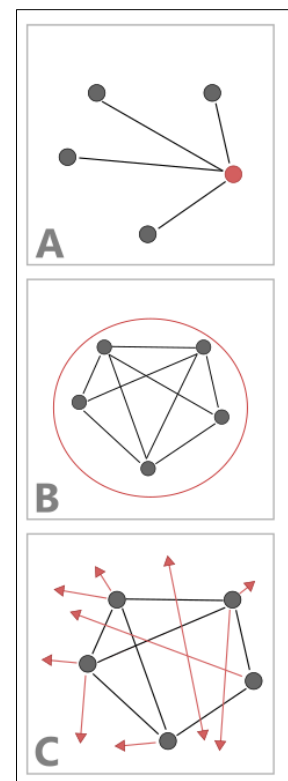
STADTFELD et al. (2020) argue that these micro-level forces may explain the formation of cliques and groups within larger structures, which then again affects the stability of such. In this theory, an additional level is added, as connections are also awarded a quality, as in negative or positive. Looking at the broader picture of connectedness within networks, it is apparent that not only the emergence of weak links (structural holes) and directed links may lead to the disconnection of networks but also repulsing forces that draw subgroups away from each other.

2.5.1.4 Types of networks

In the Literature, networks are categorized in various different ways, notably by BORGATTI et al. (2009: *closed* vs. *open*) or PUTNAM et al. (1994: *horizontal* vs. *vertical*). Commonly, the classification of KADUSHIN (2012: 17) is used, who distinguishes three types of networks:

- 1) Ego-centric networks (FIG. 17: A): The node in the centre is connected to one or several other nodes, all the other nodes are not connected with each other (or the connection is not known). Although this might seem more like a list than a network, it can still be regarded as such. An example is a person, and the list of all his/her friends.
- 2) Socio-centric networks (B) represent networks within a closed network such as a school class. This is the type of network is studied most often. All the nodes within the boundary are connected to some other node (although they do not need to all be connected to every other node), while no connection reaches out of the boundary. Applying this approach, the researcher herself is deciding which the boundaries of the network are. BORGATTI and HALGIN (2011: 1169) argue that the choice of the boundary “*should be dictated by the research question and one’s explanatory theory*”. Doing so, the researcher does not claim that no other ties within or ties that cross the boundary exist, but rather that they are not in the interest outlined by the respective research question.
- 3) Open-system networks (C) are networks, where the boundaries are not necessarily clear, for example connections between corporations. It is visible that some of the nodes are linked together, which represent the links that are known, however, many other links (in red) connect the known nodes to unknown places. While hard to investigate from a theoretical perspective, this type of network describes the most real-life configurations.

Figure 17: Types of networks. (after KADUSHIN 2012)



2.5.2 Networks in Social Science

2.5.2.1 Social Networks

Social networks have, of course, been part of human society for as long as it exists, as the network structures and interactions between the members of a group have always shaped its behaviour (KADUSHIN 2012; SCOTT 2011). Only with the beginning of the 1930s, SN have started to be investigated as such, developing to be researched in a more systematic way from the mid-20th century onwards (SCOTT 2011). Having emerged from the field of group dynamics in early- to mid-20th century, social network theory has grown to be a very interdisciplinary field nowadays (LIGHT and MOODY 2021a), ranging from applications in Sociology and Geography, to Biology and even Crime Mapping (e.g. BRIGHT et al. 2021). A significant change in approach took place in the 80s and 90s of the last century, during the “*cultural turn*” in sociology, when SN, which had formerly been seen as mainly structural things, were increasingly investigated from a cultural and relational point of view (MÜTZEL 2009).

While a lot of research has been put in the investigation of “*cliques*” and “*clusters*”, recent areas of study have been, for example, “*the usage of statistical significance tests, models of longitudinal change, the exploration of new methods of visualisation, and explorations into the cultural context of social network models*” (SCOTT 2011: 24). A comprehensive overview on the history of social network science is given by SCOTT (2011).

Looking at the appearance of the term “social network” in various journals, LIGHT and MOODY (2021a) have found a significant increase in the last decades, particularly in the 21st century, which they refer to as the “*connected age*”. SN are often networks of individuals, ranging from small local networks, personal relationship-networks to large networks on social media, but can also be networks of organizations, or collectives of people and can range from individual up to global scale (BORGATTI and HALGIN 2011; KADUSHIN 2012; LIGHT and MOODY 2021a). Despite SN being (usually) non-planar systems, with an often less clear connection to the geographic space, it is important to note that many, if not most social networks still have a connection to the real space (ANTONIONI and TOMASSINI 2017; BARTHÉLEMY 2011). While with the introduction of the internet, spatiality appears to lose importance for SN, ANTONIONI and TOMASSINI (2017) argue that it is still crucial for understanding them, as recent studies show that within SN, most members of a community still belong to a specific geographical area, even in networks that are held together through virtual space.

As the investigation of SN becomes more common and easier with the emergence, and the easy availability of big data on social connections, especially with the usage of social-media-data, SCOTT (2011) emphasizes the importance of researchers not to fall back “*into patterns, where they are more interested in data patterns than in the interpretations of those*” (IBID 2011: 25). While LIGHT and MOODY (2021a) emphasize the complexity of the topic, encompassing both theoretical and methodological approaches, they argue that “*social network analysis is greater than a method or data but serves as a central paradigm for understanding social life*” (IBID 2021a: 3)

As mentioned before, while it seems clear what SN are in general, when looking at them in more detail, the definition becomes less sharp and depends strongly on the approach that is being taken (FUHSE 2021: 1,2). In the following, a selection of four important theories of SN, or

social science theories in the context of networks, is presented in more detail, following the selection of three theories by FUHSE (2021) plus adding a fourth one in Action-Network-Theory. The latter is not explicitly explained by FUHSE (2021), showing major similarities to his first set of theories, however it is covered individually as it appears as one of the fundamental theoretical approaches in many other works. This selection is, of course, somewhat selective, as FUHSE (2021: 12) himself points out that *“approaches like network exchange theory (Emerson, Cook) and constructural theory (Carley, Mark)”* are being left out in his selection. This selection does, however, still offer an overview on the most relevant contemporary concepts in Social Network Science.

2.5.2.2 Actor-Network-Theory (ANT)

Being the most basic of the presented theories, ANT describes networks simply as chains (links), connecting nodes, here called actants. The special thing about ANT is its ability to treat all sort of things, including not only people, but also objects or abstract concepts like knowledge or resources as actants (therefore actant and not actor), which is why it is also called *“sociotechnical”* instead of *“social”* at times. As such, the theory is not per se a sociological one, but has received increasing attention in many areas of research (for an overview see: FARIAS et al. 2020), some of which are not necessarily connected to SN. (BILODEAU et al. 2019; FREEMAN 2019; JENSEN and SANDSTRÖM 2020; MÜTZEL 2009; PARK et al. 2020; PHILIPP 2017: 25–55; PIOVESAN 2020).

The concept was originally developed by Bruno Latour And Michel Callon (see e.g. CALLON 1984; LATOUR 2007) and has since been extended upon by many researchers (BILODEAU et al. 2019). Actants are connected to each other through *“translations”*, which is the act of connecting themselves to each other through a continuous mediation process. This happens through a constant process of re-negotiation and re-assuming of new identities by the actants (BILODEAU et al. 2019; MÜTZEL 2009). In this, actants can take on the roles of intermediates, when information or goods are only transported, but not changed significantly, or mediators, when the transported object is being altered (PIOVESAN 2020). Within the process of translation, actors are therefore trying to enforce their own goals and strengthen their position (BILODEAU et al. 2019; PIOVESAN 2020). The Act of transition takes part in four *“moments”* (FREEMAN 2019). While these four steps in practice are not clearly separatable, as they overlap constantly, they still offer a good guideline. The four steps, after FREEMAN (2019), are:

- 1) **Problematisation**: Controversies appear, in which actors as well as actants get involved in. When these controversies appear, also spaces for solutions and cooperation appear, which is where networks begin to form. This step of defining what the problem is and which the position of each actor is, is already part of network-development.
- 2) **Interessement**: The actors begin to reach out and find other possible actors, which they can *“interest”* in the subject and their position. The building process therefore becomes practical, as actors actively reach out.
- 3) **Enrolment**: If the actors achieve to form interessement, enrolment begins. This step encompasses the actual negotiation process between different actors or cliques, where each of the party aims to enforce its own position.
- 4) **Mobilisation**: Once a solution has formed and the network has got its structure, a solution might be agreed on and communicated to the outside by a speaker. Further, the

success and the stability of the network relies on whether the agreement can be held and whether the network structure is being reproduced.

A further characteristic of ANT is that actants can also be pooled into groups of people, which are then regarded as one actant, called “*black-box*” (PIOVESAN 2020).

The term network therefore describes “*the flows of translations that actants go through in making connections*”, (MÜTZEL 2009: 875), wherein “*there is no such thing as a social context in which actors are embedded. Instead, the social is the result of networks: actants create the social by association and by translating one meaning into another – and therefore are always much more than ‘mere informants’*” (IBID 2009: 877). The role of the analyst in this approach is to follow the chain of connections – or the actants as the trace along the network – and try to understand how they categorize and therefore produce meaning (IBID 2009).

2.5.2.3 Action Theory (AcT) and Social Capital (SC)

This approach goes back to the theories of action, originally introduced by Max Weber, and has been pioneered by the works of, among others, Ronald Burt, James Coleman, Peter Hedström and Nan Lin (e.g. BURT 2004; BURT 1992; COLEMAN 1990; HEDSTRÖM 2009; LIN 2001), with for example COLEMAN (1990), though being fairly outdated, giving a still relevant and comprehensive overview of social theories on actors within societal networks, social capital and resulting actions. Fundamentally, these theories model action on the basis of rational choice and social capital (FUHSE 2021; HEDSTRÖM 2009; LIN 2001). This theory (or set of theories) is strongly influenced by a neo-liberal thinking, as the maximization of (social) capital, similar to other theories of capital, stands in the centre of it, while the type of market can be diverse, including economic, political, labour, or community (LIN 2001). Since this theory builds on the assumption of rational choice, it should, in theory, be possible for actors to maximize their social capital if acting accordingly. As such, the theory can be seen from an economic perspective, where people invest in their social capital in their personal interest.

While different sub-streams within this group of theories exist, social phenomena are universally regarded as results from individual action (HEDSTRÖM 2009). This being the case, FUHSE (2021) points out that, despite the fact that the outcome results from individual actions, which in turn influence the actors, the structure as a whole acquires a thing-like quality on its own, through the combination of all singular actions.

In regard to networks, this means that the position of one node (in this case usually a person) determines the actor’s interests, which in turn leads to a particular action (FUHSE 2021; HEDSTRÖM 2009). Crucial to this concept is the position of a node within the network (see CH. 2.5.1.1: nodes – centrality), as it determines the power, a node has, to shape the whole of the network. This then influences the next action, which is taken. Within this group of theories, the network-actor relationship is often seen as a mutually-dependent circle, related to the concept of Homophily (see CH. 2.5.1.3). COLEMAN (1990: 300–321) describes the relationship between actors and networks as such, wherein actors have a certain power, corresponding to their social capital, which they use to enforce their personal interests. On the other hand, as specific matters are not within their own power, they interdepend fully or partially on other actors. This results in “*the various kinds of exchanges and unilateral transfers of control*” which leads to “*the formation of social relationships having some persistence over time*” (IBID 1990: 300). In this,

networks affect an individual's action in two ways (FUHSE 2021: 3; also: LEE 2014: 455): the position in networks enables and constrains action and networks influence individual preferences or interests.

Altogether, action theories in the field of social networks cannot be regarded as one homogeneous approach, but rather a school of thinking, which sticks to the same fundamental concepts. The theories are, on the one hand, characterized by the assumption of rational thinking and the will to maximize one's own power (or capital), on the other hand, build strongly on the concept of interdependence between individual nodes and their actions leading to form the network as a whole, which in turn influences the nodes and their actions. While Action theory does not offer a clear answer to what networks are, it is a very well established and often used theoretical concept in social science (FUHSE 2021).

A key concept within SNA is Social Capital. It is understood that the network represents resources for actors, which they can access to act, while the position within the network determines their power, resulting in the social capital of the nodes (BURT 2004; COLEMAN 1990; HENRY 2011). Thus, actors with less or more social capital can be distinguished. LIN (2001: 29) defines social capital as *"an investment in social relations with an expected return"* and *"resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions"*. From this, the author concludes that the following three aspects should be analysed in this context: *"(1) the resources, (2) being embedded in a social structure, and (3) action"* (IBID 2001: 29)

Explaining the workings of social capital in great detail by the example of brokerage, BURT (2004) describes the following attributes which determine the social capital of a node:

- 1) The number of links to other nodes.
- 2) The strength of the links.
- 3) The value of the links, as a link to a node with higher centrality itself has a higher value to the respective one.
- 4) The position of the link, closely connected to the point above, as the location of a link in context to the whole network matters as well. Referring to the aforementioned concept of *strength of weak ties*, (IBID 2004) emphasizes the importance of links that connect otherwise independent sub-groups. *"People whose networks bridge the structural holes between groups have an advantage in detecting and developing rewarding opportunities. Information arbitrage is their advantage."* (IBID 2004: 354).

Having explained the basic outline of social capital, it is important to note that the view on what social capital exactly is varies between different authors such as Bordieus, Coleman or Putnam (FUHSE 2021) and is also changing, as the concept is a growing and dynamic one (LEE 2014: 453). An in-detail comparison of the different approaches is offered by FUHSE (2021: 7)

2.5.2.4 Pragmatist-Interactionist-Theories (PIT)

The third set of theories developed out of the sociological-psychological school of Symbolic Interactionism and the philosophical strand of American Pragmatism, both of which emphasize the processing of meaning in the mind (pragmatism) and in interaction (interactionism) as the basic layer of social reality (CROSSLEY 2010; FUHSE 2021). FINE and KLEINMAN (1983) developed this social network paradigm by this foundation in combination with the network theory, which existed at this time. This is, of course, not far to seek, as the connection between symbolic

interactionism and network theory is a very close one (LEE 2014; SALVINI 2010: 380–385). Subsequently, important works in this field were published by for example Nick Crossley, John Levi Martin or Mustafa Emirbayer (e.g. CROSSLEY 2013; CROSSLEY 2010; MARTIN 2009). The fundamental understanding of this theory is that *“social worlds compromise networks of interactions and relations”* (CROSSLEY 2010; also: MARTIN 2009). FUHSE 2021: (8–10) identifies four key figures that make up this approach:

Table 6: Four key pushes of pragmatist and interactionist theories (see FUHSE: 2021: 8-10).

1	Focus on subjective meaning	The subjective image that actors hold of each other as well as their relationships to each other are seen as key concepts in the formation of networks (see also CROSSLEY 2010). As these characteristics are constantly changing and constantly re-negotiated, the network is a highly dynamic structure. Furthermore, how the actors look at each other, changes the way that they act, as the nodes are seen as easy-impressionable figures.
2	Processualization of relations and networks	Following the first point, the interactions between the actors (links) are equally seen as <i>“structures of meaning, that develop continuously over the course of interaction”</i> (FUHSE 2021: 9). The term “Processualization” therefore refers to the links seen as dynamic processes that are constantly re-produced through interaction. (see also: CROSSLEY 2010; MARTIN 2009)
3	Incorporation of qualitative methods	Since the links and the whole network is subject of subjective interpretation, methodology has to be adapted accordingly. Subsequently, the use of qualitative methods, as such or in combination with the classic network-analysis-techniques are being used. E.g. (DESMOND 2014) uses the methods of qualitative interviews and participant observation.
4	Push towards locating networks in social fields	Social fields, as <i>“spaces of mutual orientation, characterized by uncertainty of the actors at play”</i> , wherein <i>“the behaviour of the actors follows simple heuristics [...]”</i> , or a <i>“social aesthetics of how to relate to each other”</i> (FUHSE 2021: 9) are a field of sociology, which has been subject to research frequently in recent times, including research on “sexual fields” or “racial fields”. While the push towards following the approach of using social fields in network analysis is increasingly common, it is not by definition related to the pragmatist/interactionist approach but rather coincidentally pursued by these authors.

With this approach focusing prominently on the relational interactions between actors, it is not surprising to find vast overlaps with the subsequent approach of *relational sociology*. Many of the authors, such as Crossley or Martin, cannot be assigned to one of them, as they use aspects and combinations of both approaches in their works.

2.5.2.5 Harrison White and Relational Sociology (RS)

Relational sociology is a concept closely related to its central figure, American sociologist Harrison White, who, after being dissatisfied with previous approaches on social network theory, developed his own theory in the 1980s, which has now been extended upon by many other

researchers as well (FUHSE 2021). White's *"Identity and control: Towards a structural theory of action"* from 1992 is now the most cited fundamental theory of social behaviour within networks (FONTDEVILA 2018: 231; PHILIPP 2017: 65).

In comparison to the previous approach, RS is largely defined by one work, White's *"Identity and Control"*, which consists of a defined set of rules and characteristics. Laid down by himself, WHITE has developed a comprehensive conceptional basis for his theory. For this, WHITE (revised edition: WHITE 2012 (first published 2008); originally: WHITE 1992) has defined a number of terms, which he uses to explain his concept. The smallest entity in his theorem is called identity, which does, however, not directly correspond to actors, as an actor in White's theory can have multiple identities in multiple contexts and in relation to multiple neighbouring identities (see FIG. 18). Humans are thus by nature confronted with a chaotic world, which they are aiming to control via *"Identity"*, which is the manifestation of one's own position in relation to others. The relation between to identities is called *"story"*, which acts as a proxy for the complex and manyfold nature of possible interactions between identities. Only once a tie is re-confirmed several times from both sides of the tie, it may be called a story (see FIG. 18). When the *"stymied struggle"* between to ties for control has *"settled down"*, (IBID 2012: 20) stories *"serve to soothe identities' irreducible searches for control"* (IBID: 37).

Key characteristics of these "stories" are, on the one hand, the relationality of a story, which can be interpreted differently by different actors and, on the other hand, the fact that besides the status and the past of a relationship, also expectations for the future are incorporated within the context of a "story". With that, the concept of stories goes beyond the retrospective frame, to which network analysis is often limited (PHILIPP 2017: 68).

With the elements of identities, ties and stories, White defines four forms of configurations that can be built: (1) netdoms, (2) disciplins, (3) catnets and (4) networks (PHILIPP 2017). The theoretic concepts of (1)-(3) are touched upon only briefly (a detailed explanation is, of course, offered by WHITE (e.g. 2012) himself or also PHILIPP (2017), before moving on to White's understanding of networks.

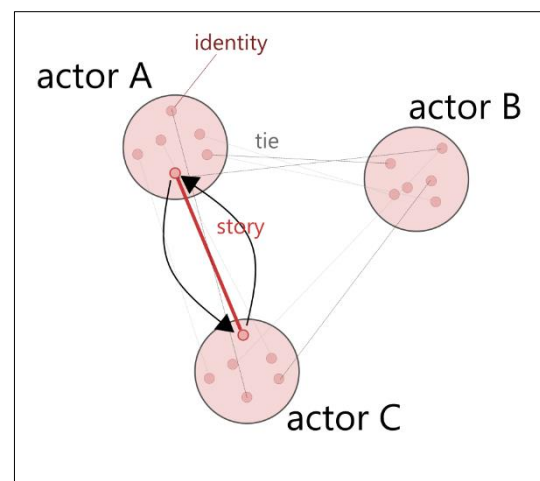


Figure 18: Depiction of actors, identities, ties and stories after WHITE 2012.

- 1) A *"netdom"* (network + domain) thereby refers to the local context of the relationship between two identities, with *"domain"* referring to the content of the tie. Actors are part of several netdoms, between which they can switch (*"switching"*), which happens unconsciously and constantly. Following this theorem, identities are generated through the switching-process, by which actors can reflect on and compare identities and subsequently define them. The definition of an identity through switching therefore defines stories, which then again defines the layout of the netdom, which is itself defined by its most dominant stories. (PHILIPP 2017; WHITE 2012)

- 2) A *catnet* (= category network) describes a set of identities more loosely connected than in the case of a network. These are formed by similarities in attributes between identities, which can be rather simple though, for example having visited the same bar frequently (WHITE 2012).
- 3) *Disciplines* are seen as collections of rules, to which identities can look up to for guidance. "*Disciplines order ties between identities, enabling joint accomplishment of tasks.*" (IBID 2012: 63).

Moving on to social networks, (IBID 2012: 20) himself describes them as "*traces from dynamics across network switchings*". While this may sound rather cryptic, he further states that "*a network can be traced as similar stories appear across a spread of dyads [a pair of two identities connected by a tie]*" (IBID 2012: 20). Thus, a network appears, as a minimum of two identities (dyad) form a relatively strong long-term tie. In this, it is important to note that identities, despite being the smallest items within network, are not its building blocks "*but projection points for their construction in stories*" (FUHSE 2021: 9). It is further stated that "*actors can be not only individual but also formal organizations (e.g. companies, universities, states) and collective actors (e.g. social movements, street gangs)*" (IBID: 12).

2.5.2.6 Comparison of theories of social networks

While in this chapter, a distinction between four theories, following the approach of FUHSE (2021), is made, it is important to point out that there is in fact no clear line that separates these schools of thinking, as they share many similarities, with some authors belonging to several or neither of these. Similarly, the distinction could also be drawn differently, as for example MÜTZEL (2009) identifies the main distinction between structuralist theories like ANT or Action-theory and theories that treat networks as explicitly relational and cultural on the other side. Based on this, the former two and the latter two theories may be combined into one each. Especially the connection between the latter two becomes apparent, as authors like Crossley and Martin feature prominently in both, which is not surprising, as RS has evolved out of structuralist network tradition (MÜTZEL 2009: 879). Furthermore, of course the selection of the depicted theories may seem rather subjective. However, the aim is to give a broad overview on the most important concepts, acknowledging that delineating all is rather impossible. While the approach of the highly-regarded sociologist FUHSE (2021) is followed, who does not delineate ANT separately, it is included, as it does provide a number of theoretical terms, such as the distinction between "mediator" and "intermediate" or "black-box", which help to outline the concept of SNA.

Relating the different approaches to each other, MÜTZEL (2009) provides a comprehensive comparison of ANT and relational sociology, where he describes both differences and similarities between the two. With similarities obviously being the shared general outline as networks of nodes and links, the author identifies two main differences between the two (IBID 2009: 880, 881):

- 1) In ANT, both humans and non-humans can be actors, while in RS, while objects to play a role, only humans are able to build "stories" and therefore construct networks.
- 2) The approach within ANT is different to RS, as in RS "*the analyst ascribes meaning to who and what counts for the analysis*", while "*ANT follows an open, interpretative*

approach when collecting data, letting the studied actors themselves make the connections” (IBID 2009: 872).

Following this, ANT and AcT may be seen as the pragmatic approaches, while PIT and RS are theories where interpretations of actor’s shape and change the network. Despite this, it cannot be said that ANT and AC have not participated in the cultural turn of sociology, as also within these theories, at least in recent years, it does play an important role, although the approach is different (FUHSE 2021; MÜTZEL 2009).

2.5.3 Policy Networks

Policy networks are generally described as formal and informal linkages of policy-making actors, both governmental and non-governmental, locally, internationally, or transnationally, as well as structures, which surround them. These networks are usually for the benefit of all parties, whereby the central aspect is the exchange of goods and information. While the manner of interaction between actors is manifold, from informal conversations to discussing and bargaining, the flow of information and experience is exchanged both consciously and unconsciously. Most commonly, PN are problem-specific, meaning that they form and exist because of one specific area of concern. Furthermore, the broader political context in which PN are embedded in is crucial for their layout, as they usually reflect the relations, alliances, conflicts, and constraints of that. PN are often quite influential and are regarded as one of the key contributors in many policy-making fields. (CALLIARI et al. 2019; GREEN SARAISKY and PIZMONY-LEVY 2020; HENRY 2011; HOWLETT et al. 2017; LEE 2021; LEIFELD and SCHNEIDER 2012; LOCATELLI et al. 2020; RANCHOD and VAS 2019)

PN are common in all part of politics and can cover Think-Tanks (e.g. MCGANN and WHELAN 2020) as well as social movements (e.g. PASSY and MONSCH 2014), educational networks (e.g. GREEN SARAISKY and PIZMONY-LEVY 2020) or networks of cities (e.g. BEHRINGER 2003). The increasing influence of PN in policy-making has led to new forms of governance, as GREEN SARAISKY and PIZMONY-LEVY (2020: 4) call it *“government without governing”*. Especially in the fields of climate crisis mitigation and adaption, PN collaborations are very prominent and have proven to be effective (CALLIARI et al. 2019; LOCATELLI et al. 2020; SCOTT 2016). Generally BEHRINGER (2003) sees an increasing shift of power towards civil-societal organisations, especially on local level.

Policy network analysis (PNA) has increasingly been emphasized in the last decades (CALLIARI et al. 2019; LOCATELLI et al. 2020). PNA is thereafter very useful, when it comes to identifying and structuring power relations and coalitions within such structures, but also, more fundamentally, what brings the actors together in the first hand, the manner of which they interact with each other and what the outcome of this may be (HENRY 2011; LOCATELLI et al. 2020). RANCHOD and VAS (2019: 31) see the reason for the increasing importance of PN as *“growing academic interest in policy networks may be seen as a response to the impact of the pace and scale of global social change on public policymaking, and the diffusion of power within the policy and decision-making systems at the global, national and local levels”*. Having said so, they differentiate between two broader schools of thinking within PNA:

- 1) Interest Intermediation school: PN are seen as intermediates between different groups (or levels) of interest, such as the government versus the population. Their aim therefore is to impart knowledge between the two.
- 2) Governance school: PN are regarded as non-hierarchical coordination of public-private interaction, each with independent interests and resources. Here, the focus is more on the governing ability of networks rather than its mediating role.

A further distinction is made in the literature on the types of PNs. While CALLIARI et al. (2019) distinguishes between formal and informal networks, the former being collaborations with a set of rules and procedures while the latter describes rather loose institutions based on traditions and norms, other authors use the concept of RHODES (1986). Following this approach, different types of PNs can be plotted along a continuum, ranging from highly integrated to loosely integrated. While this suggests that there are numerous types and subtypes of PN, most commonly *Issue networks* and *Policy communities* are separated (ELANDER and GUSTAVSSON 2019; RANCHOD and VAS 2019: 35). In other literature, *Issue networks* are, however, not seen as types of PN, but rather as individual concepts themselves (HENRY 2011; LEE 2021). Generally, Policy communities are the highest-integrated types of PN, with a high level of coordination, rules and interdependence (ELANDER and GUSTAVSSON 2019: 1085), while Issue networks are the loosest kind, with very open and uneven relations, connected only by shared policy goals (HENRY 2011: 420; RANCHOD and VAS 2019: 34,35).

2.5.3.1 Development of Policy networks

PN form generally form as a reaction to chances and problems. Actor with mutual problems or interests connect each other, in order to mutually benefit from the connection (BEHRINGER 2003). This process follows the same fundamental procedures as networks in general (see e.g. CH. 2.5.2.2: Formation of Networks in ANT).

Reasons why actors aim to form ties include shared ideology, preference similarity or dissimilarity, functional and institutional interdependence or perceived influence (LEIFELD and SCHNEIDER 2012), with the condition that mutual understanding is given (BEHRINGER 2003). However, as LEIFELD and SCHNEIDER (2012) point out, the sheer presence of shared interests and understanding is not enough, the actors also need to find each other, which is why existing channels of communication and supporting institutions are often crucial. Naturally, those actors that share beliefs and values are more likely to form ties, which is why often cliques and subsystems form within larger networks (HENRY 2011).

Following an institution-economic-thinking point of perspective, networks the formation of networks can be explained by economic benefits for its members or also the diversification of risk and costs (BEHRINGER 2003).

2.5.3.2 Characteristics of Policy Networks

Drawing from different sources of literature, in the following a set of characteristics of PN are derived. The list does, however, not aim to be complete, nor do the individual attributes apply to every single PN.

- 1) Voluntary: the membership in PNs is usually voluntary, which plays an important role in their functioning (BEHRINGER 2003). As members join Networks by their own will, a

certain degree of "*willingness to cooperate*" can be expected. This distinguishes PNs from other types of networks, where involuntary interdependence of actors forms a network (e.g. PHILIPP 2017: 111).

- 2) Polycentric: Usually, no clear centre of governance can be seen, as tasks are divided between different actors (LEIFELD and SCHNEIDER 2012).
- 3) Non-hierarchical: relationships in PN characteristically don't show clear gradients of hierarchy (BEHRINGER 2003; RANCHOD and VAS 2019: 31). Closely connected to the former point, this means that power is usually shared approximately equally.
- 4) Long-term perceptive: A crucial attribute of PN is their aim to work relatively long-term, on a stable basis (HENRY 2011; LEIFELD and SCHNEIDER 2012: 731; RANCHOD and VAS 2019: 31). A clear connection may be drawn here to RS (CH. 2.5.2.5), wherein networks are only formed, once ties of actors form a deep and mutual relationship with a long-term-perspective, as opposed to the term of *Catnets*.
- 5) Independent: Decisions within the network may be made collaboratively, but also independently by the actors, which emphasizes the fact that each actor still has the ability to act independently (BEHRINGER 2003; LEE 2021: 962)
- 6) Issue-oriented: PN usually form when the need of cooperation in one specific area of concern is apparent, not just randomly as actors like each other (BEHRINGER 2003; SCOTT 2016). Therefore, PN usually have a specific area of concern that they focus on.
- 7) Privat-public-relationship: While, by definition, a PN can be a collaboration of any policy-making actors, often the relationship between governmental and non-governmental actors plays a key role (see *Interest-Intermediation school*). While Governmental actors always hold at least some sort of decision-making power, and are therefore relevant to many issues, non-governmental often form important actors as well (LEIFELD and SCHNEIDER 2012).
- 8) Logic of action: The relationship between the members is characterized by a dyad of competition and cooperation, as any actor is (by theory) working for his own benefit (LEE 2021). These actions usually include the exchange of goods, information, work-force or ideas, while negotiation and bargaining takes place in order to reach a common output or strategy (BEHRINGER 2003).

2.5.3.3 Stability of Policy Networks

From a more general theoretic point of view (CH. 2.5.2), networks constantly need to re-produce its connection in order maintain a network structure. Translated to the context of PN, this means that the ties between actors have to be re-enforced regularly, most importantly by communication (BEHRINGER 2003; RANCHOD and VAS 2019: 43). PN therefore "*risk disintegration*", if no "*significant degree of symbiosis in resource exchanges*" (RANCHOD and VAS 2019: 34) is maintained.

(BEHRINGER 2003) divides between two types of characteristics, which are crucial for the sustainability of Networks: internal and external ones. While the former includes things like communication, understanding and trust, the latter refer to the relationship the network has to the "outside world". As BEHRINGER (2003: 5) argues, networks need to keep communicating with outside-actors and other networks as well, in order to stay "*innovative*". Internally, not only the

fact that actors communicate with each other, but also the *"quality of exchange"* (weight of the tie) is important.

Crucial for the quality of links is mutual trust between actors (BEHRINGER 2003; EMERSON et al. 2012; HENRY 2011; LEE 2021). As LEE (2021) argues, PN are *"built"* on the basis of mutual trust. (HENRY 2011) connects the aspect of trust to social capital, as he defines this by a combination of specific reciprocity (meaning the mutual exchange of attraction or repulsion) and trust. As he frames, *"if both policy beliefs and social capital strongly influence network structure, then networks should exhibit advocacy coalitions consisting of actors with similar belief systems knit together by high levels of social capital"* (HENRY 2011: 420).

LEE (2021) further distinguishes between *trust* and *distrust*, wherein the latter does not simply refer to the absence of trust. Trust and distrust therefore co-exist parallel to each other, with trust being concerned with confidence of good, while distrust is about fear and confidence of bad (IBID 2021: 963). Actors that have the same mission, or the same identity are therefore more likely to trust, while distrust is fostered by competition and incongruent values. Having pointed out the value of trust, (IBID 2021: 963) still acknowledges that a certain degree of distrust may also be valuable to networks, as that animates the PN to form *"more sophisticated relational measures (e.g. contract or monitoring) to mitigate risks or vulnerability among network actors"*.

Connecting this to the aforementioned concept by STADTFELD et al. (2020) on positive and negative ties, trust and distrust may be one of the driving factors of connecting and disconnecting actors and cliques, and therefore weakening the connectivity of the network and therefore its stability.

A further point crucial to the stability of PN is its *"inclusiveness"*. This term describes to what extent the *"right"* policy actors are included within the network, in order to *"take into account the scope of the policy problem from various perspectives"* (RANCHOD and VAS 2019: 34). As such networks not only need to make sure they are closely connected within, but also that key actors are connected well. BEHRINGER (2003) emphasizes in this context the importance of so called *"Gatekeepers"* (referring to the original concept by GENOSKO 1999), who are actors within a network that take up a specifically central role, as they are able to connect the network to outside actors, as they are able to understand and translate different patterns.

2.5.3.4 Strengths of Policy Networks

While the strength of PN for connecting and therefore supporting actors with issues that are difficult to solve individually and has proven valuable in many areas of research (GREEN SARAISKY and PIZMONY-LEVY 2020; LIGHT and MOODY 2021a; LOCATELLI et al. 2020; PHILIPP 2017; RANCHOD and VAS 2019), fundamental work on the strengths of Policy networks and their capability of problem solving are mainly fairly outdated. Nevertheless, works of BEHRINGER (2003); KOPPENJAN and KLIJN (2004); ROCH et al. (2000); SRIDHARAN and GILLESPIE (2004) provide a valuable insight on what these PN can accomplish.

Notably, KOPPENJAN and KLIJN (2004) have developed a comprehensive overview on why traditional ways of problem solving are increasingly insufficient to the problems of the present. Because of reasons like the increasing intertwinement of actors, globalization, turbulent environment, value pluralism and more (KOPPENJAN and KLIJN 2004: 3–5), the authors frame so called

“wicked problems”. These are problems that cannot be solved by traditional approaches, which is why the network approach may offer a solution.

Going with this approach, it is apparent that especially the lack of information and knowledge on other actors leads to the described uncertainties. Naturally, the network approach offers an intuitive solution, as one of its main strengths is the exchange of that (BEHRINGER 2003; CALLIARI et al. 2019). BEHRINGER (2003) sees networks as capable of building new knowledge through the combination of the different aspects of members, closely connected to the term of “tacit knowledge”. This describes a type of knowledge, which is bound to specific people, as it is hard to explain and pass on.

Moving away from the perspective of the network as a whole towards, the perspective of individual actors, problem-solving capability is also closely connected to Social Capital (see SRIDHARAN AND GILLESPIE 2004). Only if an actor is closely integrated within the network, will he be able to access its full problem-solving capability. Connecting this to the aspects of connectivity touched upon earlier, the combination of weak and strong ties play an important role (LIGHT and MOODY 2021a; ROCH et al. 2000), as weak ties are likely to offer new information, while strong ties are, of course, usually more readily available.

BEHRINGER (2003) further point out that strengths of PN are its capability to provide not just one solution but adjust the policies that have been agreed upon to the individual needs of the actors. The duality between independence and cooperation of actors therefore provides one of the main strengths of networks.

2.5.4 Networking

The term networking is described, for example, by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as “the process of meeting and talking to a lot of people, esp. in order to get information that can help you”, adding “especially in your job”⁶. Other common definitions follow this basic definition, usually with a focus on work-related networks. In the following chapter, however, networking is not understood solely in this regard, but as any activity of an actor within a network, which can also include activities not directly related to two or more actors talking with each other. The focus is laid on networking within transnational networks of municipalities, as the case study is one, drawing most prominently from the work of DEL BIAGGIO (2016a), as it resembles the Case studies in this work closely. This section focuses on insights from the literature, whereas results from the own case studies are compared to this in the discussion part.

2.5.4.1 Reasons to join / not join networks

Most logically, the place to start is asking, why actors would choose to join - or try to join - networks in the first place. For this work, of course, PN, are of greatest interest. In a comprehensive study about three networks in the Alps, namely AiA, Alparc and Alpine Pearls, DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) conducted various interviews with members of the networks, investigating, among other issues, also their reasons to join. Most importantly, exchanging experiences and the promotion of a certain agenda (in this case sustainable development, as these network work in the framework of the AlpCon) are mentioned. More practically, finding specific solutions or

⁶ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/networking>

expertise to existing challenges and financial support, mostly by providing access to external funds, are further reasons. On top of that, also raising the profile to the outside world, in this case to be a member of *"a club of sustainable municipalities"* (IBID: 219) was stated. Interestingly, DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) also explored reasons, not to join networks, although on much smaller scale. Here, reasons that are mentioned include the ability to join in projects even without being member of a network, the membership fee, already being engaged in other networks, lack of personnel and time resources and differing mentalities within the perimeter of the network. While many reasons to join a network are there, (IBID 2016a: 233) finds in some cases researched, *"all these arguments are not strong enough, unless there is at least one committed person in the municipality"*.

While these are general reasons to join, obviously the decisions to do so are very different for each actor. HENRY (2011) differentiates between two types of members, the *"members of knowledge"*, who's main focus is on gaining and exchanging information, and such members (subsequently referred to as *"engaged members"*) who are actively engaged in policy making and norms, with many actors doing both things simultaneously. Distinguishing between these types of members is crucial, as there is possibly no way, and also no need to fully involve all members of a network, if some identify themselves solely as *"members of knowledge"*.

2.5.4.2 Dimensions of networking

Closely connected to the reasons to join networks, are the actual things that the network is used subsequently. Again, following the approach of DEL BIAGGIO (2016a), five main dimensions of networks may be distinguished, as described in the following:

Political dimension

The network may be used to increase the political strength of a municipality, therefore providing the strength to be heard by higher-level politicians, which would otherwise not be the case. The membership in such network also gives the municipalities ability to justify sustainability projects and support the sustainable voices within a municipality, as DEL BIAGGIO (2016: 236) cites a local actor of ALPINE PEARLS: *"the legitimacy of the network helped them to 'knock on the right door'"*.

Similarly, the shared exchange of experiences with others, for example on concrete implementations of projects further strengthen their political position, as DEL BIAGGIO (2016a: 240) cites an Italian actor of AiA that it is *"difficult for local authorities to find counter-arguments, since concrete implemented examples can be shown [...]"*. Additionally, the network may help to make even further connections, outside of the network.

Also on local level, the membership in the network is regarded as valuable in this study, as it may help the raise the awareness within the population as well, and therefore justify decisions.

Socio-cultural dimension

The importance of personal meetings is highlighted, as these contribute to building personal and lasting relationships between actors. The cultural exchange, which usually happens in these personal meetings is regarded as a valuable input too. DEL BIAGGIO (2016a: 252) even mentions that, at some points, the pleasant atmosphere is used as a *"strategy [...] to create a favourable*

climate for working on serious issues like sustainable development". The building of strong (personal) ties can subsequently can also be used otherwise (BEHRINGER 2003).

Pragmatic dimension

The more pragmatic dimensions include exchanging experiences and finding project partners as well as projects to take part in. It is noted that networks provide an even better way to exchange information, as it is possible, to go deeper, than by written reports. An important aspect, which is highlighted in the case of these networks, is their work to translate the different information in all Alpine languages, as otherwise, they could not be understood by all.

Ecological dimension

While the ecological dimension includes points such as raising awareness or showing the way how to behave sustainably, DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) does not find many explicit references on how sustainable development is conceived by the members, which she assumes, may be as *"it is taken granted by the majority [...] and they do not consider it worth mentioning"* (IBID: 266).

Economic dimension

Economically the same reasons apply again, such as finding project partners and raising funds. In her interviews DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) finds a number of instances, where actors claim to have gotten much easier access to funds, once they joined a network. Moreover, joint marketing is mentioned, as well as the economic benefit for the region, when organising an event. It is further mentioned that, especially when it comes to joint marketing, smaller municipalities may profit more than bigger ones.

2.5.4.3 Challenges of networking

Several possible challenges and barriers of networking are mentioned in the literature (CALLIARI et al. 2019; DEL BIAGGIO 2016; DEL BIAGGIO 2009; RANCHOD and VAS 2019; SCOTT 2016), which are summarized in five categories in the following.

Participation

A key component of a working network is the regular participation of its members, as described from theoretical point of view, where it is pointed out that the connections need to regularly be *reproduced* to stay stable (see CH. 2.5.2.2: network-actor-theory; CH. 2.5.3.3: stability of networks). However, the possibility of this is often limited, as DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) describes in her case study, where many members are not able to take part in network events regularly. Reasons for not being able to participate include long distances, financial efforts and lack of personnel and timely resources (DEL BIAGGIO 2016; SCOTT 2016). Especially in the Alps, where distances between to places can be quite large, since the ways of transport are not as straight-forward as in the lowlands, travel times can be too long - even more so when more climate-friendly modes of transport are preferred over flying, which might be the case in a network dedicated to sustainability.

Even new tools of communication do not necessarily solve this problem, as even in online events, many members do not take part (DEL BIAGGIO 2016). Moreover, Online-communication

does not provide a full substitute for personal meetings (see CH. 2.5.4.2: socio-cultural dimensions).

All this may lead to a situation, where the costs of maintaining the network structure outweighs the potential benefits (SCHNEIDER et al. 2003; SCOTT 2016).

Language and culture

In the Alps, as a particularly multi-lingual and multi-dialectal area, the issue of mutual intelligibility seems particularly important. However, as DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) finds, despite the fact of language definitely being an obstacle at time, many actors in her research point out the remarkable efforts made by the networks to make communication possible. This is coherent with the findings of this work as well, where language is almost in all interviews mentioned as a challenge, but seldom a barrier. In fact, much rather the importance of emphasizing the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Alps is highlighted.

Culturally, different approaches on how to tackle problems, on the understanding of the nature of politics and cooperation as well as mutual misunderstandings can also contribute to a certain distance between actors (DEL BIAGGIO 2016). This is also stated by FISCHER (2022), who emphasized the different way of how things are being done on Germany as opposed to, for example, Italy, not only administratively, but also when it comes to smaller, individual actions. At the same though, she also points out the ability of the network to make people learn from each other in this regard as well.

Internal structure

The design of the internal structure of the network is a major challenge as well. Every network consists of active and less active members (DEL BIAGGIO 2009; HENRY 2011) grouped by DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) into three categories (as opposed to two by HENRY 2011; see above), *leaders*, *active members* and *silent members*. Furthermore, these networks are often highly reliant on single people, often mayors of cities (especially if, as the case in AtY, only they can sit on the committee) to carry out important positions or act as linking players (DEL BIAGGIO 2016; HENRY 2011). This may be a problem, if certain individuals are no longer able to commit to their responsibility.

The question of how to involve lesser active members into the network is a key one, as is also shown by the Interviews, where several interviewees point out that the network AtY should focus on quality rather than quantity, quality in this case meaning the strength of the connections (see also: DEL BIAGGIO 2016: 323).

Further challenges for the administration of the networks include deciding on a sensible method of electing the board/committee, agreeing on a clear and comprehensible thematic focus (DEL BIAGGIO 2016; DEL BIAGGIO 2011; DEL BIAGGIO 2009), mobilising the relevant actors for the implementation of projects (CALLIARI et al. 2019) and working out a system of addressing potential conflicts within the network (RANCHOD and VAS 2019).

External structures

The structures of other levels of governance that the networks are coping with can be a challenge, for example the different ways of administration in the Alpine countries. As described in

CH. 2.4.2, these differ in substantial ways. It has been shown that, despite its ability to work parallel to existing structures, the Alpine networks are highly depend on national structures (DEBARBIEUX 2009), as DEL BIAGGIO (2016a: 303) states: *"although local political actors are aware of defending Alpine interests and promoting transnational projects, the national anchorage is still very present in their minds."*

Especially France is pointed out as an example, which may cause trouble, as the centralised administrative framework makes the work in the network rather difficult. DEL BIAGGIO (2016a: 306) cites one Swiss mayor, who goes as far as claiming *"French mayors have to call Paris for every 20€ they want to spend"*. While not pointing to specific examples of administrative barriers, different administrative structures are amongst the most mentioned challenges in this research as well.

Size of the network

The question as to what the appropriate size of a network is, seems to be a central one, as it is addressed regularly in the interviews. While, on the one hand, the closeness of the members may be lost in a bigger network as well as coming with an even higher administrative challenge, growing would, of course, also mean growing in significance. In the study of DEL BIAGGIO (2016a), actors mention the importance of a quality control, as the touristic value of the network would suffer, if any town can be member (especially the case for Alpine Pearls).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Description and justification

The general aim of this thesis, as depicted in CH. 1, is given by its three main research questions:

- 1) Which are the decisive factors for networks such as AtY to be able to successfully contribute to the sustainable urban and regional development of its members?
- 2) What is the added value for its members in terms of sustainable urban and regional development?
- 3) Which recommendations and strategies for AtY and comparable associations can be derived from the above?

Although the questions are answered separately from each other to give the work a more comprehensible structure, it is important to point out that all three of them are actually closely connected to each other. Questions 1 and 2 essentially ask the same question from two perspectives, once from the perspective of the network as a whole and secondly from the perspective of the members individually. Question 3 solely aims to derive the key points from the two questions above, thus is not opening a new chapter on its own.

Looking at fundamental literature on networks, it is apparent that they are defined by the relationship of points and nodes, wherein points make up the network as a whole, but still are able to act individually (e.g. BALLAS et al. 2017; LIGHT and MOODY 2021a). This is especially emphasized in the context of policy networks (which is what the networks in question essentially are), where the points, here actors or members, are free to choose whether they aim to reach a common solution with the other actors in the network, implement a specific variety of the agreed solution or go their own way (e.g. BEHRINGER 2003; LEE 2021; RANCHOD and VAS 2019). Despite this, within network theory, it is emphasized that the network, once it has developed, can also be seen as its own entity, with attributes, strengths and weaknesses. Drawing from this, it seems only reasonable to investigate the networks in question from both perspectives. It is, however, important to point out that in this work, the network approach is used from a theoretical point of view rather than a methodological one.

While networks form the theoretic concept for the investigation, the extent of the researched area is limited spatially to the Alpine arc, as defined by the AlpCon, and thematically to the topic of "sustainable development". As is explained in CH. 1, this combination makes sense, when looking at the crucial need to develop space more sustainable in this area. Since the Alpine space is an especially trans-nationally connected space, with authors like DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) or DÜHR (2018) going as far as regarding trans-national initiatives in the area as more important than national ones, the network approach seems to be the fitting one for this question. At the same time, transnational networks have proven to be especially effective when it comes to solving border-spanning topics, which many of the aspects of sustainable development are (LOCATELLI et al. 2020; RASHIDI and PATT 2018). Taking all this together, the combination of using a network approach on investigating how sustainable development may be influenced by trans-national initiatives is promising. Regarding the need for more sustainable development in general, but particularly in the Alpine space, as given, researching how trans-national

networks, which are so crucial to its development, can foster this, therefore is a relevant and pressing matter.

3.2 Structure of the thesis

The thesis draws from a theoretical and an empirical part, from which the conclusion is derived. The theoretical part is divided into five sub-sections:

- 1) **First**, the space in question is outlined and explained, in order to give an understanding of the extent of the problems at hand.
- 2) **Secondly**, the main issues, the area faces, are depicted.
- 3) Furthermore, an overview, of what the term "sustainability" means, will be given, focusing on the Alpine region (**three**).
- 4) In the **fourth** part, the most important actors in the Alpine space, and how they made the area a trans-nationally institutionalised one, is explained. Specific focus is laid on the associations "Alpine Convention" and "Alpine Town of the Year", as they form the basis for the subsequent empirical part, with AtY providing the case study towns, while the Alpine Convention forms the foundation of the work, AtY does.
- 5) In the **fifth** chapter, networks are discussed in more detail. Beginning with the most fundamental layout of networks in general, the chapter then moves on to the explain networks in social science and policy networks in more detail. Lastly, networks are investigated from a more practical point, wherein dimension, challenges and strength of networks are discussed, based on literature featuring empirical studies. This structure from broad to specific does, however, not only aim to give a broad understanding of the topic, but also conclusions on the specific matter of trans-national city networks and especially AtY will be drawn from all levels of theory.

Following the theoretical part (and the methodological one), the thesis moves on to the **results**. Here, solely the results from empirical research are presented, which are put into context with the theoretical part in the subsequent discussion part. In the results chapter, each of the Case Study towns, as well as the association "Alpine Town of the Year", which has also been investigated empirically, will be described in detail.

In the **discussion part**, insights from both strands are knit together, to provide answers to the aforementioned three research questions. Questions 1 and 2 are answered from two perspectives:

- 1) Network theory: From a theoretical point of view, what are decisive factors. Drawing from the theoretical part, factors are discussed and put into context with transnational city networks, especially AtY.
- 2) Case studies: Insights from the empirical part of the work are discussed. Here, it is not the aim to re-produce everything that the representatives have said but work out common patterns that have shown regularly.

Following this, the insights from these two questions are used compromised into recommendations, in order to answer Q3. The recommendations are divided six categories, each containing specific measures.

Lastly, the results are compared to previous works that have been done on Alpine networks (notably by: BÄTZING 2015a; 2015b; BÄTZING and CHILLA 2014; BEHRINGER 2003; DEBARBIEUX et al. 2015; DEL BIAGGIO 2016; 2011; 2010; 2009; PERLIK 2019b; 2001) and Alpine Town of the Year (e.g. KÜBLER 1998; NEUGEBAUER 1998; PERLIK 1998) as well as previous diploma theses (BAUMGARTNER 2010; BUCHL 2010).

3.3 Case studies

The empirical part of the work consists of an in-depth analysis of one important trans-national network in the Alpine region, namely Alpine Town of the Year. The cooperation of this work with AtY is of two-fold nature: on the one hand, the association aims to gain insight on the added value of networks such as itself, while, on the other hand, it provides the opportunity for this research to investigate it as an empirical example in more detail. At this point, it is important to mention that AtY has not influenced the selection of the case study towns, the research questions, or the methodological approach of this work in any way.

In addition to studying the network as a whole, also a number of case study towns, namely members cities of the association have been identified, in order to gain further insight on the member-perspective. The case study towns were selected out of the total of 23 Alpine Towns that exist. A pre-selection was made on the following criteria:

- 1) Diversity of the examples (different countries, regions, sizes, time periods).
- 2) Towns, which actively take part in the projects of the association are favoured.
- 3) For the matter of communication, mutual intelligibility is essential (German; English).

While these criteria aim to select a most diverse set of examples, the selection, especially because of the points 2 and 3, is, of course, somewhat biased, which is further discussed in CH. 3.5. Criteria 1 aims to get a most diverse set of examples, with the hope of being able to capture different points of view. Point 2 is important to include, as investigating members, which do not take part in the actions of the association is rather pointless, while Point 3 is given by the linguistic restraints of myself.

Following this, the subsequent pre-selection was made:

Table 7: Selection of Case study towns.

	Country	Region	Inh.	member Since
Passy	FRA	Auvergne-Rhône-Alps / Haute-Savoie	11 000	2022
Idrija	SLO	Goriška	12 000	2011
Villach	AUT	Carinthia	61 000	1997
Sonthofen	GER	Bavaria / Oberallgäu	21 000	2005
Brixen-Bressanone	ITA	Trentino-Alto Adige-Südtirol	22 000	2018

Belluno	ITA	Veneto	35 000	1999
Brig-Glis	SUI	Wallis	12 000	2008

After contacting representatives of each town, six agreed on taking part as Case studies, which includes being interviewed. It was not possible to reach an agreement with Belluno. FIG. 19 shows the geographical distribution of the selected towns.

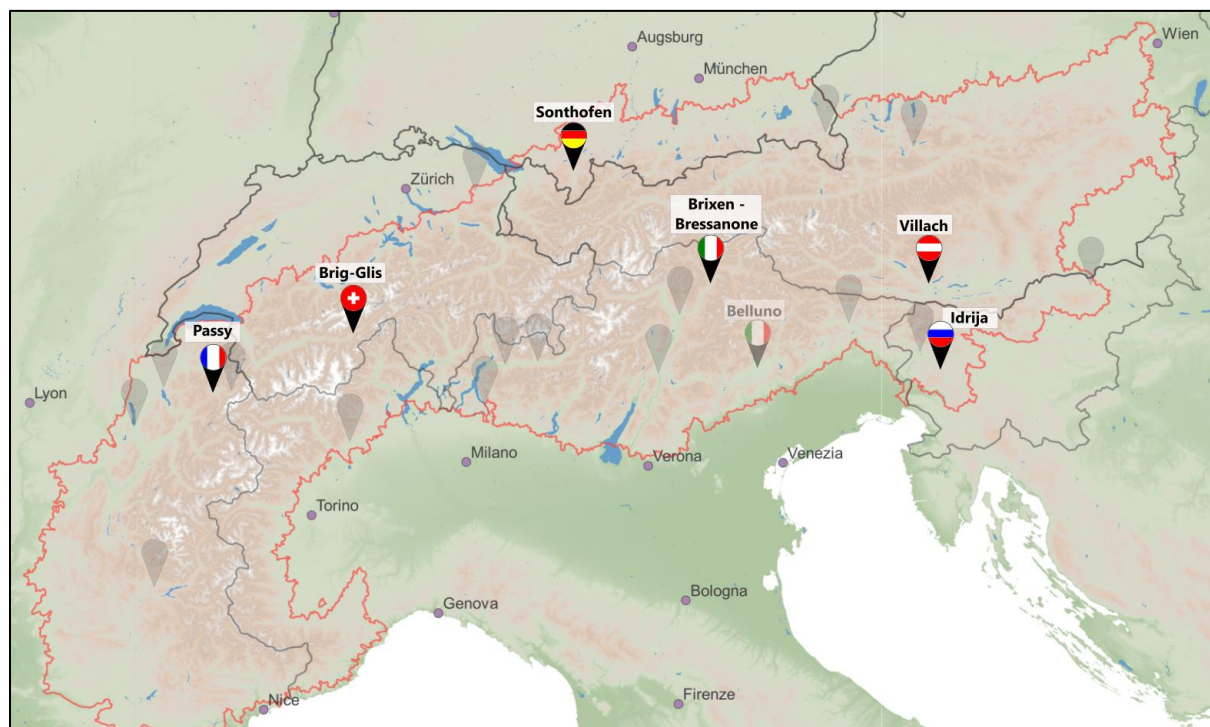


Figure 19: Geographical distribution of the Case Study Towns. In light grey: other AT.

In addition, an interview with a representative of Alpine Town of the Year, current managing director Magdalena Holzer, was conducted. In the following, an overview on the interviewed people is given, including their respective positions:

Table 8: Interview partners.

Nr.	Person	City / Organisation	Position
1	Raphael Castéra	Passy	Mayor of Passy
	Pierre Oliver Carra		General director of services and technical agencies in Passy
	Juliette Vodinh		External stakeholder; AtY-consultant Passy
	Zoé Sarra		Intern Passy
2	Ingrid Fischer	Sonthofen	Second mayor of Sonthofen, Responsible for AtY-matters; Co-president of AtY

	Manfred Maier		AtY-Consulent Sonthofen
3	Karmen Makuc	Idrija	Consultant for economic activity Idrija; Involved in many AtY-projects
4	Gerhard Leed	Villach / AtY	Co-Initiator of AtY; current Jury-member; Pro-Vita Alpina
5	Christine Redlein	Villach	Finance and Economy City administration of Villach; AtY-Consulent Villach
6	Peter Natter	Brixen-Bressanone	City councilman Brixen; responsible for AtY-matters
7	Monika Holzegger	Brig-Glis	Chief executive of "Alpenstadt Brig-Glis"; AtY consultant for Brig-Glis
8	Magdalena Holzer	AtY	Managing director of AtY

3.4 Interviews

3.4.1 Layout

A total of 7 interviews were conducted, one with each of the case studies, but two with Villach, plus one with the AtY-representative.

The interviews with the Case Study towns each follow the same basic layout, while some questions are altered to the individual towns. For these interviews, the qualitative method of *"problem-centred"* interviews, as described by MAYRING (2016) is used. As MAYRING (2016: 70) describes, *"it suits brilliantly for theory-focused research, as it does not have a solely explorative character, but also aspects of the primary problem-analysis are included. Anywhere, where already a fair amount is known about the subject, anywhere, where specific questions have priority, this method is suitable"* [translated]. It is characterized by a questionnaire, which leads the interviewee to a specific area of concern but leaves space for individual opinions and stories. The three basic ideas of this approach are:

- *Problem-centred*: the interview focuses on a general problem, which has been worked on beforehand.
- *Subject-oriented*: The interview is specified to the interviewed person or setting.
- *Process-oriented*: the full extent of the subject only becomes apparent during the research process

Thus, the interviewer aims to create a space of trust between himself and the interviewee, wherein the latter feels safe and is provided space to express her opinions openly. Following this, three types of questions are usually distinguished:

- 1) *Sounding questions ("Sondierungsfragen")*: usually, the interview starts with easy, general questions to set the field.
- 2) *Guideline questions ("Leitfadenfragen")*: questions that have been prepared beforehand, in order to steer the interview in the desired direction.

- 3) *Ad-hoc questions ("Ad-hoc-Fragen")*: the interviewer may also ask spontaneous questions in-between, if something is unclear or she wants a point to be re-emphasized.

Derived from this, the following questionnaire was developed, which acts as the basis for the specific questions that were asked to the interviewees. The questionnaire is divided into four parts (plus the introduction). The first questions are aimed as short questions, where general topics are asked. Subsequently, Part B is on the AtY network, and how the specific town connects to it, while part C is on the town itself and its individual problems. Part D rounds off the interview with, again, open questions, where the interviewee has the opportunity to add things that have not been mentioned beforehand.

Table 9: Interview guideline 1.

Nr.	Section	Question	Topic
I	<i>Introduction</i>	Can you tell me a little bit about you and your position in the town of "XX" and regarding Alpine Town of the Year?	Sounding-question; general information
A1	<i>Short questions</i>	How did you know about the network "Alpine Town of the Year"? / What was the decisive reason, "XX" decided to join the network "ATY"?	Reasons to join the network
A2		With which towns within the network do you cooperate the closest?	Subgroups within the network; Barriers of networking
A3		Is „XX" part in any other transnational networks?	General information
B1	<i>Alpine Town of the Year</i>	How do you think can "XX" contributes to the network "ATY"?	Input to the network
B2		What output are you hoping to get from "ATY"? What is the network being used for?	Output from the network
B3		What are the main Challenges / Barriers of networking?	Challenges of networking
B4		What is the specific added value of "AtY", also in comparison to other networks that exist?	Added value of AtY specifically.
C1	<i>Town-specific</i>	Each town has specific areas of sustainable development, which have been highlighted by the jury. Here, the question is, what exactly has been done in this area.	Focus of sustainable development
C2		Has the nomination for AtY been a reason to invest more in sustainable development?	Added value / impact of AtY

C3		Which specific challenges in terms of sustainable development is "XX" facing? How can "ATY" possibly support the Town with these?	Challenges for the town; Expectations on the network
C4		Which projects would you like AtY to do? Depending on whether the specific town is actively taking part in project or not, the question is framed differently.	Expectations on the network
D1	<i>Outlook</i>	Who would you recommend to join the association AtY?	Reasons to join the network; Space for open opinions
D2		Where do you see the future of AtY?	Generic ending question

The interview with Alpine Town of the Year generally follows the same guideline, however, it is altered more radically, since many questions do not make sense in this context. Therefore, the same topics (among others) are aimed to come up for discussion, while the questions are different. Additional to the specific topics, also a number of questions on the association in general were asked.

Table 10: Interview guideline 2.

Nr.	Section	Question	Topic
A1	<i>Short questions</i>	Not every AT is member of the association. How many AT are currently members of the association.	General information
A2		How many members would you call "active"?	General information
A3		Is the member fee the same for all members, independent of the size?	General information
A4		How many cities do apply? Are applicants rejected?	Joining the network
A5		Does an AT have to be "city" by definition?	General information
B1	<i>Alpine Town of the Year</i>	What are reasons to join the network?	Reasons to join the network; Input/ Output from the network
B2		What are the things, for which the network is used the most?	Input/ Output from the network
B3		What are the main Challenges / Barriers of networking?	Challenges of networking

B4		What is the specific added value of "AtY", also in comparison to other networks that exist?	Added value of AtY specifically
B5		To what extent does cooperation with other networks happen?	General information
C1	<i>Projects</i>	Which type of projects does the network want to emphasize in the future?	Thematic focus
C2		What are areas in which the association wants to focus in the future?	
C3		What are strategies to involve lesser active members?	Involve all members
D1	<i>Outlook</i>	Who would you recommend to join the association AtY?	Reasons to join the network; Space for open opinions
D2		Where do you see the future of AtY?	Generic ending question

3.4.2 Analysis

The interviews were done via Videocall or in person (in the case of Sonthofen), recorded and afterwards transcribed. The topics of each question (rightmost column) are used to later compare the ideas on these subjects, which are given by the interviewees.

The interviews with Sonthofen, Passy, Brixen and Brig-Glis were conducted as planned, in the case of Villach, two separate interviews were done. Unfortunately, representatives of Idrija were not able to conduct the interview personally, but only in written form, which means the answers do not hold the same quality and may not be fully comparable. The interview with Magdalena Holzer, representing the association AtY, was also conducted in written form.

According to the layout of the Interview Guideline, the answers were filtered into a selection of sub-groups, for each of which a short summary is provided in the results part. A brief comparison of the answers of the different towns using key words is shown in TAB. 11. In the discussion part, the results are analysed in a quantitative manner, based on the presented results.

3.5 Limits of the analysis

Selection bias

In order to reduce the study to a size, which is bearable in the context of this thesis, a selection of Case studies had to be made. While effort was made to make the selection as representable as possible, as well as describing the factors why the respective towns have been selected thoroughly, a selection bias is apparent. As the towns are greatly different to each other, a different selection would most likely have led to different results, although, it is argued that the overall insights are likely to have been analogous.

A random selection of case studies would have prevented a conscious selection bias, however, this was abstained from, as it may have led to a rather one-sided assortment. Furthermore, this study is reliant on the fact that interviewed individuals are actively taking part in the network in question, otherwise, no meaningful insights could have been given. Additionally, it is unlikely that interviews could have been arranged with "inactive" members anyway.

The choice to limit the selection to relatively "active" members does, however, neglect a large portion of members, potentially leaning towards a favouring selection, as potentially unhappy members were left out. This fact is to be considered and kept in the back of the mind when interpreting the subsequent results.

Selection vs. sample

The selection of Case studies follows a clear structure, as explained. As not with all selected towns an interview was able to be arranged, the sample is distorted in this effect.

Sample size

The research includes only a limited sample of towns. To further improve the significance of the results, a larger sample would have been beneficial. Furthermore, only one Alpine institution (AtY) was investigated in detail. For the overall picture of the assemblage of pan-Alpine institutions, comparison to other networks may be profitable. Possible further studies in the field to expand this scope would most certainly improve the comprehensive understanding.

Different types of interviews

While in principle, it was aimed to conduct the same type of semi-structured, problem-centred interview, carried out in a personal conversation, for all the Case Studies, ultimately, the type of interview did differ from one to another. While in the Case of Brixen-Bressanone, a combination of written and spoken answer were provided, in Idrija, only written answers were received. The written structure does, of course, change the dynamic of the interview, as no spontaneous *ad-hoc questions* are asked. It is therefore to mention that not all interviews provide the same depth of insight. However, all Case studies do, as a whole, contribute to the overall preposition of the thesis.

No "Pilot phase"

As described by MAYRING (2016: 69–72) a "Pilot phase" is to be performed before conducting the actual interviews. This phase aims to train the interviewer and refine the questionnaire. This phase was not performed in a comprehensive way, which means, the interview conduction and questionnaire layout were still elaborated from one interview to the next, resulting in possible differences in the quality of the interviews.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Case study towns

4.1.1 Passy

Passy is a small-sized *commune* with about 11 000 inhabitants, consisting of a number of individual hamlets. It is situated in the French *Pays du Mont Blanc*, the Mont Blanc region, within the *Département Haute-Savoie* in the greater *Auvergne-Rhône-Alps* region. Being situated along Arve River, the municipality lays between the *Mont-Blanc-Massif* in the South-west and the *Massif du Giffre* in the north. The town stretches over a significant range of elevation (542 – 2804m). It is a major tourist destination, as in proximity, several ski fields, as well as a nature reserve and other natural attractions, are to be found. Current challenges, the town is facing, include the topology of the far-stretched settlement, transport and mobility, and Air quality.

Interview

Participants: Raphael CASTÉRA (Mayor of Passy), Juliette VODINH (external employee who works for Passy, especially in terms of ATY-related issues), Pierre Oliver CARRA (technical employee at the municipality of Passy), Zoé SERRE (Intern at the municipality of Passy). The Interview was conducted via zoom and was subsequently manually transcribed. The answers were mostly provided in French and then translated by Zoé SERRE into English.

Joining the network

Passy joined the network in 2022 in response to a specific problem it is facing, air pollution. As the former government was *“not very aware of the problem”* (CASTÉRA 2022), the current team hopes to gain and exchange expertise in the network. From the side of the jury, two reasons are given for the selection of the town, once *“the role that the town has taken and can take on at the local level in its immediate environment”*, on the other hand, *“its strategic geographical position”* (ATY 2022b).

Dimensions of networking

Passy hopes to use the network for exchanging experiences and expertise, as well as carrying out joint projects. The town hopes in particular to be able to address projects on specific issues, namely air quality and mobility, and is also willing to initiate projects on its own in the future.

Challenges of networking

As challenges for networking, three points are mentioned. First, the language, second, to have a dedicated contact partner within every Alpine town and third, to have regular meetings and exchanges. They propose, regular meetings on regional basis could be arranged, additional to annual or semi-annual full assemblies. Regarding the second point, it is mentioned that at times, it is difficult to know who to contact in specific Alpine Towns, which is why it may be useful to have a list of *“dedicated technicians”* for each town. Additionally, it may be helpful to have an archive of finished projects and topics, where results and insights can be looked up.

The website of AtY is described as *“not as operational as it could be”*, as it is *“more like a window to look at the ideas and goals and not so much on the operational things that the network does”* (VODINH 2022). It could therefore be optimised for the Alpine Towns to use themselves.

Strengths of the network

The main strength of the network is seen to be the dedication to the AlpCon, to specific issues, as well as its small and personal character with lots of communication and exchange. *"50 towns within the network would not be helpful, and slow things down probably"* (CASTÉRA 2022). For possible future members, towns of medium size are suggested, particularly ones that share the same problems of having to combine settlement and nature preservation in a mountainous environment.

Furthermore, the cultural diversity of the network is emphasized: *"What makes the network so important is the differences between the cities and at the same time the common problems that we have. It's this combination that makes it such a powerful network"* (SERRE 2022).

Projects

Projects so far: Convent of the mayors.

So far, the town *"remains kind of modest"* (CASTÉRA 2022), as it first aims to get to know the network, however, in the future, mutual projects and information exchange is targeted. While the exchange of common views and problems in general is a major concern, specific areas are mentioned, for example mobility and transport.

4.1.2 Idrija

The town of Idrija is a municipality of about 12 000 inhabitants, laying in the west of Slovenia, about 40 kilometres west of Ljubljana and some 50 kilometres south of the *Triglav* national park. Being right on the edge of the Alpine perimeter, it is surrounded by sub-Alpine foothills. After having been a major producer of mercury in the past, the town has now shifted towards a more tourism-, high-tech and service-based industry. Nowadays, the demographic development of the region, in particular to keep young and educated people in the town, is seen as one of the major challenges.

Interview

The interview was done with Karmen MAKUČ, who works for the city of Idrija and is, among others, responsible for AtY. She has taken part in several AtY-Projects. After request of the interviewee, the questions were not answered personally or via Videocall, but in written form.

Joining the network

The town joined the network in 2011, as the aim was to take on environmental responsibility and raise awareness of the topic. Besides its strategic location, the jury also pointed out a number of particular projects of the town, including bicycle paths, a "Geo-Park" and the creation of decentralised sewage treatment plants.

Dimensions of networking

The network is used for sharing knowledge and expertise, as well as to find and recruit partners for future projects.

Challenges of networking

As barriers and challenges, the distance between the towns and differing legislations in different countries are mentioned. Furthermore, the task to be able to convince the public of the necessity of the measures is pointed out as an important challenge.

Strengths of the network

While no explicit strengths of AtY in particular are mentioned, the importance of being able to exchange with other towns with similar problems is highlighted. In the future, the hope is that more sustainably behaving towns will join the network.

Projects

Projects so far: Convent of Mayors, Alps2030, GaYA, Photo competition, Tour des villes, Youth Alpine Express, YSAM.

Having taken part in lots of AtY-projects so far, it is apparent that Idrija sticks to its goal of using the network for mutual projects. In order to involve lesser active members more in projects, it is recommended that they *“need to be introduced to the benefits of participating in projects”*, as well as including more NGOs and young people.

4.1.3 Sonthofen

As one of only two German AT, Sonthofen is situated in the *Oberallgäu* Province within the state of Bavaria, fairly close to the Austrian border. The town lays on the foot of the *Allgäu* mountains, thus offering a wide variety of mountaineering activities, and is known as a “Bike-city”. Within the region, it acts as a regional hub.

Currently, sustainable mobility, in particular “Bikeability”, participation and low-level-initiatives are specific areas to work on.

Interview

The interview was conducted with Ingrid FISCHER, second mayor of the town of Sonthofen and Co-president of the association AtY and Manfred MAIER, who is the AtY-consultant of Sonthofen and does administrative and legislative work for it. The conversation was held on site in the city hall of Sonthofen, was recorded and afterwards transcribed.

Joining the network

The reasons to apply for the admittance to the network in 2005 (the town had already applied in the year prior) was the aim to take action towards sustainable development on international stage. While some initiatives of the town were commended by the jury, the *“incentive for further efforts by the town to create a future worth living in”* (ATY 2022b) was also pointed out by the jury-decision. After joining, the goals of the AlpCon have been anchored into the municipal constitution, which means, any decision that is being made needs to be aligned with the Alp-Con.

Dimensions of networking

The network is utilized for regular exchange with other members including mutual invitations and visits. The importance of in-person meetings is highlighted, as also some instances of mutual aid in specific projects are mentioned, for example helping Brig-Glis to set up a Youth parliament or exchanging expertise on flood control with Brixen.

The network is also seen as a tool to gain voice on a higher-level, such as the national or the European stage, and to gain access to available funds. As MAIER (2022) phrases it, *“you are able to contribute to the European goings-on and thus you can, of course, make Sonthofen a little bit better known internationally”* [translated].

Challenges of networking

Similar to other interviewees, distance, language and different administrative structures were mentioned as barriers of networking. However, the aspect of language is seen to be a lesser problem in the future, as younger people would be able to converse in English without problems.

Strengths of the network

Adding to the aspect of language, the efforts of the administration to provide instant translations at meetings as well as multilingual official documents are praised, as the multi-cultural aspect of the Alpine region is regarded as very important. Especially when it comes to legal documents, being able to have them available in your respective language is very important.

As a big strength of the network, its smallness and familiarity are pointed out. In comparison to other networks, such as AiA, the approach of AtY, to treat every town individually, is seen to be very important. The approach of AtY is described as giving the towns the ability to work on their own projects under the umbrella of a greater agenda, rather than all working together on one project.

Projects

Projects so far: Convent of Mayors, Photo competition, Tour des villes, AYSAM.

The interviewees suggest that the projects of AtY need to be visible on a low-level, within the local population, in order to raise the awareness of the project and warrant its necessity. FISCHER (2022) points out that *“something that I promote within AtY strongly is that we take along the population in the cities with smaller projects.”* [translated].

Lesser active members need to be involved pro-actively, for example by visiting them personally, which is something that the representatives of Sonthofen aim to do in the future themselves.

4.1.4 Villach

As the very first AT, Villach is also one of the larger cities within the network. It lays on the western edge of the Austrian *Klagenfurter Becken*, surrounded by some lakes, including the *Faaker See* and the *Ossiacher See*, and large mountains to almost all sides. Being fairly close to both the Slovenian and the Italian Border, Villach is regarded as somewhat of a crossroad of cultures. Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in general are mentioned as two important priorities for the city development to date.

Interview

In the case of Villach, two separate Interviews were conducted. First, Gerhard LEEB, who is a founding member of the association and currently in the jury, was interviewed via telephone. Secondly Christine REDLEIN, who is the current AtY-consultant of the city of Villach and works in the city administration, was interviewed via Zoom.

As Villach is the first Alpine Town of the Year, addressing the founding history was of particular interest, which is where Gerhard LEEB was able to provide valuable insights. On the other hand, however, current ongoings in the city of Villach were also to be made subject, which is the main focus of the second Interview with Christine REDLEIN.

Joining the network

Unlike all other members, Villach was not awarded by the Jury as an AtY, but was simply selected to be the first one, as the initiative started there. It is noted, however, that the award was given also as a trigger, to further push sustainable initiatives in the region. According to REDLEIN (2022), the award has an impact even now, as the sustainability-thought is ever-present in the decisions of the city council.

Dimensions of networking

Currently, Villach is not very active in the network, apart from occasional participation in events and currently the Alps2030 project. However, the impact, the title has had on projects in the town in the past is highlighted, especially on the *Dobratsch*, a mountain right next to the town. *"Even if it does not always have to be under the title AtY, it always has some influence"* [translated] (REDLEIN 2022).

Challenges of networking

Apart from structural differences in different countries and towns and the question, to what extent certain measures are transferable from one town to another, also the lack of time resources is mentioned as a major barrier. *"There simply are things that are more important. When you drive to a meeting in France, [...] that's three days for me, half a weekly workload. But then, there are, of course, other things to do as well"* [translated] (REDLEIN 2022).

Strengths of the network

LEEB (2022) points out the close relations and the liveliness of the network. *"We have become a family"* [translated], he mentions. On the other hand, he also sees a great touristic value of AtY, especially when it comes to promoting sustainable tourism.

Projects

Projects so far: photo competition

Despite being to longest member of the community, Villach has only taken part in one project, plus another one, (Alps2030) which is pending at the moment. The interviewees do, however, point out that Villach is willing to take part more actively if the proposed projects can be implanted within existing structures of the city administration.

LEEB (2022) states that he hopes for more activistic and publicly visible projects, especially also involving the youth. Joint marketing within the network as well as some small initiatives, like putting up a sign, reading "AtY", at the entrance to the city, may already make a great difference.

4.1.5 Brixen-Bressanone

With some 22 000 inhabitants, Brixen-Bressanone is of the regional centres within the autonomous South-Tyrol region of Italy. The town is located in the *Eisacktal (Valle Isarco)*, some 40 kilometres north of Bozen-Bolzano. Being surrounded by mountains and Alpine landscape, as well as the fact that three different Alpine languages (German, Italian and Ladin) are spoken in the town, underline its Alpine character. Focuses of the town currently include protecting the environment, sustainable projects in general and in particular mobility and youth participation.

Interview

The Interview was conducted with Peter NATTER, who is municipal council in Brixen-Bressanone and focuses on topics like Environment, Sustainability and Europe, including also AtY-Agendas. The questions were initially answered in written form and complemented by a Video-Interview.

Joining the network

Brixen-Bressanone joined the network in 2018, as they aimed to increase the awareness for the topics that the AlpCon stands for in the population. As Brixen already was on the path of sustainable development before, as NATTER (2022) points out, the admittance to the network did not result in a paradigm change, but aimed to promote the communication of the topic. That vision is shared by the jury, who highlight the *"lasting success [...] of a sustainable Alpine Policy"* and the implementation of *"the AlpCon in a goal-orientated manner"* (AtY 2022b).

Dimensions of networking

The network is mostly used for sharing common experiences, best-practice examples and expertise. Furthermore, communication and joint public relations are a priority.

Challenges of networking

The lack of time resources is regarded as one of the major challenges, *"as always when it comes to networking"* [translated] (NATTER 2022). NATTER further points out that communication structures could be more efficient, for example, by using innovative platforms such as *Microsoft Teams*. Furthermore, the joint marketing and press work of the network could be improved.

Strengths of the network

The network gives the ability to exchange experiences outside of the box, beyond the towns that one is in contact with anyways, as NATTER (2022) says *"what happens in towns like Passy, you would not usually pick that up"* [translated]. He further points out that everyone can always learn from the other, as *"better well copied than done badly yourself"* [translated].

While he hopes that the network will further grow in the future, he points out that a great strength is sustainable growth, that there is no advantage in growing too fast.

Projects

Projects so far: Convent of Mayors.

While Brixen has yet not taken part in many projects themselves, they do hope to do so more in the future. As NATTER (2022) mentions, these could as well be smaller projects too. He does, however, point out that joint marketing and communication of the projects and activities would be helpful as well.

4.1.6 Brig-Glis

Brig-Glis, a municipality consisting of the former independent towns of *Brig*, *Glis* and *Brigerbad*, is located in the Swiss upper *Valais*, acting as the centre of the German-speaking part of the valley. It is home to some 13 000 inhabitants and lays along some important transport routes. The town is located north of the *Walliser Alpen*, which include some of the highest peaks of the Alps.

Interview

After written answers on part (A) of the interview were sent in beforehand, the parts (B)-(C) were answered in an online-Interview with Monika HOLZEGGER, who is the chief executive of the association “*Verein Alpenstadt Brig-Glis*”, which is responsible for implementing AtY initiatives in the town.

Joining the network

Triggered by a specific project, the *NEAT Lötschberg*, Brig-Glis applied for AtY in 2008 to set a signal for sustainable development both internally and externally. The town further hoped to promote regional cooperation. In the interview, HOLZEGGER (2022) did, however, point out that regional cooperation is no longer a priority in this regard nowadays.

Following the award in 2008, an association called “*Alpenstadt Brig-Glis*” was founded, which is since responsible for dealing with AtY-matters within Brig and implement projects, being funded by the city council with 100 000 CHF annually.

Dimensions of networking

Besides taking part in projects and exchanging knowledge and experience, the network is also used by the town to promote sustainable development internally and externally, to set a signal and to use the network to promote the Alpine identity. Furthermore, horizontal communication is highlighted, as well as building lasting connections to towns all over the Alpine arch.

Challenges of networking

Similarly to the other towns, different languages and differing administrative and political structures, as well as distance are mentioned as barriers. HOLZEGGER (2022) points out, however, that she sees these as challenges, which can be worked with, rather than actual barriers.

Strengths of the network

The network is described as very active and innovative. HOLZEGGER (2022) states that “*I like the contemporary focus [...]. The fact that every year a new Alpine Town joins, helps to make sure that no sworn-in circle of members develops, where nothing new has space*” [translated].

The importance of a new member joining each year is stressed, as new perspectives on existing problems may be introduced thus.

Projects

Projects so far: Photo competition, GaYA, Alps2030

Brig-Glis regularly takes part in AtY-projects, however decides for each project individually, if it fits into the agenda of the municipality. HOLZEGGER emphasizes that a project need to have links to existing issues, which they can pick up upon: “*ideal are concrete links, where demand for action persists, and an external initiatives are introduced, with which respective benefit can be generated*” [translated] (HOLZEGGER 2022).

4.2 Alpine Town of the Year

As history and structure of the association are covered in CH. 2.4.5, in the following, the focus is on the results from the interview.

Interview

The interview-questions were submitted to the secretary of the AtY-association via e-mail and answered by Managing director Magdalena HOLZER in written form, with option to reconcile via telephone.

Joining the network

The usual procedure for joining the network is that the association approaches towns, of which they think may be sensible members, or interested in the network, often mediated by existing members. While towns are usually not rejected, the jury may provide improvement proposals for the towns if they join.

While to date, usually one town is awarded the title per year, changes to that procedure are being discussed internally, for example awarding the title every two years, or also awarding it to collectives of municipalities. HOLZER (2022) states that there are “at least” ten good reasons to apply for the title:

- 1) Recognition of the already accomplished
- 2) Gaining helpful contacts
- 3) Access to innovative Projects
- 4) Access to international partners
- 5) Access to Alpine-wide expertise and competence
- 6) Cross-border communication and marketing, improving the towns visibility
- 7) Internationally visible marketing
- 8) New incentives for the local governance
- 9) Representation on international stage
- 10) Flexible network, where wishes and needs of individual members are taken into account

Dimensions of networking

While, of course, all the above-mentioned reasons to join the network may also be interpreted as dimensions of networking, especially the cooperation in mutual projects, exchange of expertise and inspiration as well as the access to finding projects partners are emphasized. It is stressed that this cross-border cooperation does happen beyond any political boundaries.

Challenges of networking

The lack of time resources is seen as the greatest challenge, especially as for many members the responsible people deal with the network voluntarily, in their free time. Therefore, large personal engagement of individuals is necessary.

Strengths of the network

The network sees itself most importantly as a connector of different towns with similar challenges and problems all over the Alpine arch, wherein especially its ability to connect towns



Figure 20: The logo of AtY.

over a large distance, which may provide new and valuable insights, is pointed out. The Emphasis therein lays on mutual understanding and trust. That can be important especially for smaller municipalities, which perform important roles in the provision of basic supply, as they exist a lot in the Alps.

Projects

In the future, especially projects in cooperation with smaller municipalities in the Alps are to be emphasized, most importantly on the matters of Air quality, tourism and visitor management, and youth participation.

In order to involve lesser active members, the association aims for a pro-active strategy, where individuals are approached individually, and convinced of the benefit of the network.

4.3 Comparison of the results

Table 11: Comparison of Case study results.

Topic	Specific topic	Passy	Idrija	Villach	Sonthofen	Brixen	Brig-Glis
Sustainable development in the town	<i>Focus, challenges</i>	Bi-seasonal sustainable tourism; mobility; nature conservation; air quality	Sustainable tourism and development in general; Demographic development	Sustainable Mobility and economy; city lighting; water provision; heat adaption; greening	City development; (youth) participation; Bikeability; low-level initiatives	Youth; mobility; energy	
	<i>Areas to work on in AtY-context</i>	Mobility; transport (locally); Air quality		Enliven city centres and support small businesses; generally sustainability projects	None specific; administrative assistance	(smaller) project; raising awareness	(small) contributions to sustainable development through projects
Joining the network	<i>Reasons to join the network</i>	Solve specific problem (pollution)	Environmental responsibility; raising awareness	Promote the implementation of the AlpCon; trans-border connections	Take action internationally and in terms of sustainability	Raise awareness in the population	Specific project; signal internally and externally; promote regional co-operation
	<i>Other networks</i>	none	none	none	AiA; close connection to CIPRA; other projects (ARE, EU)	EUREGIO Triol-Südtirol-Trentino	None, but strong transnational activity (e.g. Interreg)
	<i>Impact of joining</i>			Various projects (e.g. Naturpark Dobratsch); lasting influence;	Anchoring of sustainability in city law; promotion of	No projects in particular;	"Verein Alpenstadt Brig-Glis", which is funded with 100.000CHF

				Concept of sustainability;	sustainability projects	raising awareness in the population	annually; stronger transnational involvement
Dimensions of networking	<i>Works closest with</i>		All active members	Geographically closer towns	All active members	Geographically and linguistically closer towns	All active members
	<i>Input to the network</i>	for now, remain "modest"; In the future expertise, know-how	Sharing of knowledge and joint projects	Participation in meetings; administrative work	regular communication and visits; expertise (e.g. "Bike city", youth participation); administrative work	Sharing of experiences from projects and expertise	Participation in projects; meetings; exchange of knowledge; set a signal; Alpine identity
	<i>Output / Expectations from the network</i>	Inspiration; expertise; share experiences on specific problems (mobility, air quality)	Experience, exchange opinions; gaining project partners	Promote the implantation of the AlpCon	Exchange of experiences and knowledge; international recognition	Information, Best-Practice examples; experiences; joint marketing	Horizontal exchange with other towns; building connections
Barriers / Challenges of networking	<i>Barriers / Challenges</i>	Language (esp. German and Slovenian); dedicated reference person; regular exchanges; following up finished projects and topics	Distance; different legislations; Convince the population	Organisational structure; workload; no personal contact during Pandemic; structural differences	Distance; language (not for young people); different administrative structures	Lack of time; inefficient structures and communication	Different languages; administrative and political structures
	<i>Proposals</i>	Regional subgroup meetings,		More activism; Promote public		Improve communications;	

		list/archive of finished projects and topics; better website		visibility; Connect expert staff		enhance joint marketing and press work	
Strengths and Weaknesses of the network	<i>Strengths of the network</i>	Individuality of the towns		Are a "family"; close relations; Lively network	multilingualism in documents and meetings; "family"	Similarity of the concerns	Active and functioning network; innovative
	<i>Weaknesses</i>			Visibility, implementing the set goals;	Dependent on single people (mostly the mayor)	Inefficient modes of communication	
	<i>Specific value of AtY</i>	Dedication to the AlpCon, specific goals.		Touristic value, promote sustainable tourism,	Smallness and familiarity, individual approach of projects	Exchange (outside of the box)	Innovative and open, highly relevant topics
Projects	<i>Projects</i>	None so far	Multiple, highly active	Few, lately less active	A few, currently active	None so far	A few, currently active
	<i>Initiate own projects</i>	Are planning to		Currently no, but possibly	Currently no	Currently no	Currently no, but possibly
	<i>Type of projects needed</i>		Towns need to be shown the benefits of the projects	More concrete projects; clear output	Low-level; visible projects; proactive approaching of towns	More, also smaller ones – but better communicated and marketed	Concrete links to existing issues
Outlook	<i>Who is the network for (general)</i>	Middle-sized cities with issues of combining mountains,	All municipalities with focus	Rather smaller towns	Similar environment and issues; Lighthouse-towns	Any city in the Alps	Any city in the Alps of a reasonable size

		settlement, and nature	on sustainability				
	<i>Who is the network for (Specific suggestions)</i>	Sallanches; St.-Gervais in the region; Small and Middle-sized cities in the department Savoie			Innsbruck, Lindau, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Lindenberg, Rosenheim, Wasserburg		possibly more towns in Switzerland, e.g. Chur or Thun
	<i>Future of the network</i>	Stay small; strong connection; personal exchange	Include more towns that behave sustainably	Involve youth; focus on climate change; Depending heavily on the broader political context	Lively and active members instead rather than lots of members	Growing in terms of quality and possibly quantity (sustainable growth)	Definite relevance in the future; Important to stay open and innovative

5. DISCUSSION

In the following, the three main research questions are discussed, as presented in the beginning of the thesis, based on the insights of both the theoretical and empirical parts. The chapter is divided into four parts: one chapter for each research question (1-3), as well as a brief comparison to previous works (4).

As this work is based on the concept of network theory. Each question is first analysed from the technical perspective of this concept, while subsequently drawing on insights of previous literature and studies, as well as this work's own empirical investigation. While networks are analysed in a more general way, the insights of the literature are focused within the geographical limitations, namely the Alpine region, considering the specific circumstances provided by the layout of the Alpine region and its organisational and administrative structure.

5.1 Factors for successful networks

The first research question asks the following:

Which are the decisive factors for networks such as AtY to be able to successfully contribute to the sustainable urban and regional development of its members?

The question is subsequently further sub-divided into three sections:

- a) What role do networks and associations play in urban and regional development?
- b) What are the specific circumstances for these in the Alpine region?
- c) Which are the decisive factors for such networks to be successful?

To answer the first part, it was investigated, what networks are, how they are defined and what they can accomplish (a). To do so, first, a more fundamental look on the background of networks is provided (see CH. 2.5), both from the technical perspective of network theory (2.5.1) and from a social science perspective (2.5.2). By example of the Alpine region, the importance of networks in the specific environment of the Alps is discussed (b), and conclusively, the decisive factors are derived (c).

5.1.1 The role of networks

A network forms when several (at least two, then called dyad) nodes are connected by a link, which represents some sort of exchange between the nodes. Any more complex network is built from arrangements of different types of triads (networks of three points). It is argued, for example by LIGHT and MOODY (2021b) or STADTFELD et al. (2020) that the very basic layout of the building structures of a network, sc. the arrangement of dyads and triads, explain the macro-structure and dynamic of a network as a whole. Thus, it is crucial to understand lacking stability or other problems within a complex network.

The fundamental theory of networks introduces a set of measures to describe a network, including *centrality* or *embeddedness* in the case of nodes and *directedness* or *strength* in the case of links, which, in combination, lead to the arrangement of different types of *ties* (see: STADTFELD et al. 2020) and *triads* (see: LIGHT and MOODY 2021b). As a whole, the network relies on its *connectivity*, which subsequently determines the effectiveness of the network. Units for this include *point-* or *edge-connectivity*. However, as for example MOODY and COLEMAN (2015) point out

though, no single measurement of connectivity can provide a complete analysis, which means, in-depth investigation is necessary in any case. Most importantly, the importance of identifying *cliques* and *structural holes* within the network structure is highlighted. Having said so, a further concept, as first introduced by GRANOVETTER (1973), contrarily delineates the *strength of weak ties*, describing links that are only connected to few neighbours but have the ability to connect far-apart sections of a network. Altogether, these measurements provide a comprehensive picture on the properties of networks.

Translated to a more subject-oriented point of view, Social Network Analysis (SNA) draws on the fundamental rules of network theory, does, however, incorporate this into the framework of Social Science. While several SNA-approaches exist, in this work, only an overview on the most important is given, including both structuralist theories such as Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Action Theory (AcT), and relational theories like Pragmatist-Interactionist Theories (PIT) and Relation Sociology (RS) (see CH. 2.5.3). These theories help to put a precise terminology to the field, as, for example, by the four-step network formation process described by (FREEMAN 2019) (ANT), or the relational sociology (RS) of Harrison White, introducing terms such as "*stories*" or "*black boxes*". The aggregate of all theories thus helps to understand the fundamental functionality of SN. While these theories do use different approaches, certain common investigations can be derived:

- Networks form when two nodes (actors) follow a common strand. According to AcT, actors commit to do so by rational choice, in order to increase their personal outcome.
- Links are made of several layers of connections, which transfer information or other goods in both directions. Following RS, a *story* is only formed once a relationship between actors is confirmed by several ties.
- Links need to be constantly re-produced and re-negotiated, in order to keep the network stable.
- The position of a node (centrality) within the network (also: *social capital*) determines how it can and will act.
- A node can be anything from an individual to a collection of individuals (RS: "*black-box*") or even, as ANT argues, an abstract concept or a thing.
- SN are highly dynamic and constantly changing, as they are determined by individual choices of actors.

Going a step further, Policy Networks (PN) specifically deal with social networks in the context of policy making, as formal or informal linkages of policy-making actors. This includes NGOs or Social movements as well as networks of cities, as described in this work. Similar to SN in general, they form as a reaction to chances and problems when actors with overlapping problems and interests link, in order to mutually benefit from the connection. With the mutual benefit being a crucial element, it is important to note that not every member may regard the network in the same way, as HENRY (2011) distinguishes between "*engaged members*", who are actively taking part in the network, and "*members of knowledge*", who are solely interested in gaining and exchanging knowledge.

Besides having similar interests, the second decisive step is that the actors need to find each other. While this may be helped by an outside force such as a network builder, naturally, more similar actors are more likely to find each other. While thematic (and in some cases

geographical) closeness is a key element of networks, it also leads to clique-development, which hinders the network's connectiveness. This tendency is underlined by the example of AtY, where geographically closer towns are more likely to join the network, resulting in an arrangement of regional clusters (see CH. 2.5.5; FIG 11.).

Once a network has formed, policy network science provides a set of factors, which determine the networks stability. These are in the following divided into internal and external factors (following: BEHRINGER 2003):

- **Internal factors:** A network needs to constantly re-produce its connections, which is most importantly done by communication. Not only the quantity of this matters but also the quality of communication, based on mutual trust (or the absence of distrust) between the members. Both the literature and the empirical findings underline the importance of personal meetings in this context, which provide an extra level of connection. While communication forms the most important layer of linkage, also exchange of knowledge and experiences via different channels, such as a website, brochures, or project archives provide an additional and potentially very efficient mode of exchange. The connectiveness of the network does further rely on connecting the right actors to each other, with the ones with particularly high SC being of specific importance. Furthermore, "weak ties" perform a crucial role, as they link weakly connected parts of the network (cliques) to each other.
- **External factors:** The network needs to stay connected and open to the outside world, on order to stay innovative. The role of "gatekeepers" (as first introduced by: GENOSKO 1999), is of particular importance in this regard, as they provide connections to the outside world. In the case of AtY, this task is, for example, provided by the secretary of the association, which enables the members to connect to related institutions in the Alpine region.

Looking at the empirical findings within the example of AtY, many of the abovementioned factors are confirmed. While, for example, the similarity of the concerns, the thematic focus and the close relations of its members are highlighted, on the other hand, inefficient structures of communication and dependency on individuals are described as weaknesses of the network. Structures of communication are partly described as less "innovative", wherein especially the exchange of information via non-direct communication tools is lacking quality. On the other hand, the connecting function of AtY to external actors is positively pointed out.

5.1.2 Specific Circumstances of the Alpine region

The Alpine region presents an exceptionally fascinating study area, as it comes with specific circumstances, which particularly benefit the formation of network structures. The region is very complex, as it looks back to a long history of cultural development, which can nowadays be seen by the diversity of cultures, languages, specialised ways of living and settlement structures. These have an impact even now, although rapid economic changes in the last centuries (including industrialisation, tertiarization, touristification) have disturbed the long-lasting interplay of traditional valley and mountain societies. While the region is split into several individual countries, the region has a tradition of regional governance on the one hand, and trans-regional cooperation on the other. The Alpine identity may be very different for different actors,

however, certain similarities, such as “the proudness to be a mountain inhabitant”, being included in a “community of problems” or the common goal of sustainable development unify people and organisational structures.

To date, the most pressing challenges are regarded to be the demographic development and the environmental crisis, especially the climate crisis. While the physio-geographic environment is a challenging one to begin with, due to the volatile and dynamic nature of the Alps, it is further worsened by the impacts of the climate crisis, which have been proven to impact mountain regions, and particularly the Alps, over-proportionally. Demographically, emigration and urbanisation are great challenges, especially when it comes to keeping young people in the region. This development is, however, vastly different for different regions, with structurally stronger regions naturally performing better. It is to be noted, however, that geographically far-apart places may experience similar challenges (e.g. the demographic development of Slovenia and the Southern French and Italian Alps). A consistent trend, however, is the ongoing urbanisation process, with cities becoming increasingly important for the regional development. Both the economic and demographic development tie in directly with Mobility, Transport and Accessibility, which are further vital challenges, the region is facing. This includes both mobility on individual level, as well as higher-level issues of transport, most notably freight traffic, which, due to the Alps central position in Europe, is becoming a more pressuring issue.

Facing all these demands, an increasing development towards what is called “sustainable development” can be observed, including industries such as tourism, which is expected to face the need to change drastically in the near future, but also city development and regional planning. Sustainability is an important, if not the most important unifying factor for the assemblage of Alpine organisations.

While no universally agreed on definition of the term “sustainability” exists, many organisations in the Alps refer to acting towards the goals of the Alpine Convention. The AlpCon does, itself, not offer a definition of the term itself, but it does pledge to the SDGs, and, with its protocols, offers a number of action guidelines in specific areas of action. These legally binding protocols do, however, vary greatly in their strictness and ambition (see CH. 2.4.3), which is why they are regarded rather weak by many researchers. On the other hand, both the SDGs and the AlpCon protocols do certainly offer a great basis for understanding what actions can be taken within a broad selection of topics. It can be said, though, that the associations may still profit from a clearer definition of the term. Especially when looking at the heated discussions going on elsewhere, it is clear that sustainability is no straight-forward concept. Recently, post- and de-growth approaches have criticized the concept of “sustainable *growth*”, which, as they argue, is self-contradicting. Furthermore, the classical three-pillar model of sustainability, rating environmental, social, and economic aspects equally next to each other, has been called into question. The neo-sustainability approach argues in favour of an integrated model, wherein the environmental aspects are the basis for the social ones, which, in turn, are the base for the economic pillar.

Within the Alpine organisations, it is not clear how the term is interpreted; however, it may be said that they usually lean towards the traditional “sustainable growth” paradigm. In terms of weighting the three pillars, the environmental side is often described as “overarching”, leading

to the interpretation that this one may be weighted slightly heavier. A clear commitment to how sustainability is defined, is, however, lacking within the Alpine institutions.

The trans-national actors in the Alps can be separated into two main groups: EU-related actors and non-EU-related actors, most of which work under the umbrella of the AlpCon and CIPRA. It is important to note, however, that these two strands are by no means separated, as several projects are carried out together, with AlpCon-related projects often relying on EU-funding.

The on-going pan-Alpine institutionalisation is driven by a two-fold impetus of top-down (EU, AlpCon, National States) and bottom-up initiatives (local inhabitants, projects). The connecting point of the two are a number of pan-Alpine networks dealing with specific matters, such as AiA, ALPARC or AtY. Having been criticised for being a top-down project in the past, CIPRA has subsequently initiated these networks in order to implement the ambitious but abstract goals of the AlpCon on the level of citizens. With the legal means of the AlpCon partly toothless, however, it is argued (e.g. by: WOLF 2016) that the connecting ability of AlpCon related networks may in fact be the currently strongest weapon for it to implement its goals.

AtY is one of the networks under the umbrella of CIPRA, dealing in particular with urban and regional development, as it connects cities. In comparison to other networks such as AiA, AtY is much smaller, its role within the assemblage of Alpine organisations is therefore a different one. With the title being a recognition of achievements of towns, AtY also aims to act as a showcase of particularly commendable examples. The different approach of AtY is underlined by the dimensions of networking described by the members (see below; CH. 5.2), which focus much more on personal relations and exchange, rather than political weight or access to funds.

5.1.3 Decisive factors

Looking at the picture as a whole, certain similarities between the different levels approaching network structure can be derived. It is apparent that the fundamental structures of networks, as described by network theory, re-appear in the science of social networks as well as the specific circumstances of Alpine networks.

- 1) The connectivity of the network is crucial for it to effectively work – in order to understand this, the micro-level structure of the network must be investigated. Key components of a network must be identified and connected.
- 2) More similar actors are more likely to find each other. This may lead to clusters and cliques, which weakens the connectivity of the network.
- 3) Certain actors have special importance to the network, such as weak ties or gate-keepers. The example of AtY shows that often the loss of single, key individuals can lead to the disintegration of parts of the network.

The integration of these is especially significant. To strengthen edge-connectivity and node-connectivity, more actors need to be connected by several links. In practice, this means relying less on single connections and actors.

- 4) Links need to constantly be re-constructed, otherwise they will fade away, destabilising the network.
- 5) Not only the quantity, but also the quality of links is crucial, as only with re-iterated and mutual exchange, lasting connections can be formed. Personal meetings play

a particularly important part in this, as they provide connections that cannot otherwise be accomplished.

- 6) Networks need to stay innovative and open to the outside. If they do so, they have the ability to provide its members with insights outside of the box. Particular importance in this comes to Gatekeepers and weak links, which need to be identified and protected.
- 7) Actors do not only have to share interests but also need to actively find each other. To build a network, potential members must be brought together pro-actively.
- 8) A clear thematic focus is necessary, as only therethrough actors can be brought together. Both for recruiting members and engaging existing members, a clear guideline of what the network deals with and wants to accomplish is necessary. The concept of "sustainability" appears to be the connecting point for many actors in the Alps. The AlpCon and the SDGs do prove to be a useful tool in this, as they provide a broad understanding of the term. However, further sharpening of the concept may be necessary, as "sustainability" is a heatedly discussed and constantly re-negotiated term.
- 9) The Alpine region is being increasingly institutionalised – besides EU-efforts, Alp-Con-related actors play a significant part in this. The networks function as the connecting point between the two aspects of the two-fold impetus. To fulfil this task, networks must regard the higher-level requirements while acting on a low threshold.

5.2 Added value for network members

Research question two changes the perspective from the network level to the level of the individual members, asking:

What is the added value for its members in terms of sustainable urban and regional development?

Again, combining network theory with insights from literature and the empirical work, the aim is to derive specific points, where members profit from being part of a network. While from the point of view of network theory, certain parameters such as connectivity or centrality are of importance, these are subsequently translated to a more practical application, as dimensions, challenges, and advantages of networks. These, as described in the literature, are analysed and compared to the empirical findings.

5.2.1 Network theory

As described above, a network forms, when two or more actors with overlapping interests find each other and agree to form mutual connections, which are to the benefit of all. From the point of view of the actor, its position within the network is crucial, as only with a high social capital the full problem-solving capacity of the network can be accessed. In order to do this, an actor needs to connect to as many other nodes in the network as possible, especially the ones which have high centrality as well, and improve the weight of the links. Looking at the three different types of centralities, as introduced by BORGATTI and EVERETT (2021), the degree can be estimated in different ways, all of which do, however, essentially measure the connectedness of the point to its neighbours. It is also shown, however, that the connectedness of the network as a whole does impact the centrality of a single point, for example when looked at from the “flow outcome perspective”. This means the overall connectedness of the network is of interest of any single node.

Once connected, networks can provide actors to solve so called “wicked problems”, as termed by KOPPENJAN and KLIJN (2004). These refer to issues, where uncertainties (classified into three sub-categories: substantive, strategic and institutional uncertainties) limit the actor’s ability to determine the ideal path of action. By forming a network, these uncertainties can be circumnavigated. Further advantages of network, as described in the literature, include the ability to exchange so called tacit knowledge, knowledge that cannot otherwise be transferred, the ability to reach out to otherwise unattainable nodes via the connection of weak ties, as well as a networks character-duality of interdependence and cooperation. The latter enables actors to work on individual problems while still profiting from the Know-How of the network as a whole, which is one of the advantages that have particularly been pointed out in the empirical investigation.

5.2.2 Dimensions of networking

Moving on to the perspective of Policy Networks, a network can be used in a number of dimensions. In the following, a comparison of dimensions of networking, as described by DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) and the dimensions offered by the empirical research in this work is provided. Note, however, that “dimension of networking” and “reasons to join the network” are combined in this, as they essentially describe a similar concept from to different angles. In fact, in an ideal

world the expectations (reasons to join) would align perfectly with the observed outcome (dimensions).

Table 12: Comparison of Dimensions of networking as described by DEL BIAGGIO 2016, Magdalena HOLZER (interview), and the Case Studies.

Dimension	Aspects as described in DEL BIAGGIO 2016	AtY (Personal interview)	Case study interviews (Brackets: Number of mentions)
Political	Increase political weight	"Representation on international stage"	The will to take action internationally (1); International recognition (1)
	Justify projects within the municipality	-	Strengthening of sustainability movements within the municipality (2)
	-	New Impulses for the own political landscape	-
Socio-cultural	Building personal and lasting relationships	"The membership in the association creates direct contacts"; exchange "with little effort"	Close personal relationships (6)
	Cultural exchange		Cultural exchange (4)
Pragmatic	Exchanging experiences	"The membership in the association creates direct contacts"; "International exchange of partners"	Exchanging experiences (6)
	Finding project partners		Gaining project partners, taking part in projects (3)
	Finding projects to take part in		
Ecological	Raising awareness	-	Raising awareness (2); environmental responsibility, set a signal (2)
	Know-How	"Alpine-wide competence"	Exchanging Know-How, Best-Practice, etc. (6); Know-How in specific areas (4)
	-	-	Promote the Implementation of the AlpCon (1)
Economic	Access to funds	-	Municipal funding (1); access to funded projects (3)

	Joint marketing (especially for smaller municipalities)	“trans-border communication [...] – international, multi-lingual public relations work” “The title can be used for marketing”	More prominent joint marketing is wished (2)
	Economic benefit of organising an event	-	-
Recognition	-	Recognition of achievements	-

TAB. 12 compares the dimensions suggested by HOLZER (2022) in a personal interview and DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) with the answers provided by the interviewed network members. While the combination of DEL BIAGGIO and HOLZER offers a comprehensive selection of dimensions, many of them are not, or not consistently, brought up by the town representatives. While the more obvious dimensions such as “exchange of experiences”, “Know-How”, “cultural exchange” and also “joint projects” appear to be among the most important aspects, others are less prominent. On the political stage, “international weight and recognition” was only scarcely mentioned, despite this being one of the main aspects, a network provides. Also, “joint marketing and press work” is only a concern of few interviewees, with those who do mention it, wishing for a better implementation of it. “Access to funds” is not mentioned at all.

While these results are not to be taken at face value, as, of course, certain aspects might just not have been at the front the head of the interviewees when asked, may have seemed too obvious, or may overlap (e.g. “new Impulses for the own political landscape” and “exchanging experiences”), the results as a whole still provide a comprehensive picture.

In the case of funds, it is likely that many members do profit from the access to them despite not mentioning it. However, it is shown that a clear outline of what benefits a project provides for its participants may be helpful, as REDLEIN (2022) describes a fictional scenario: *“There is the opportunity, via EU-funds, to get 80% of what has been invested refunded, and you could profit from this concretely like this ...”* [translated]. The need for a clear statement of what a certain project can accomplish for the town, how it may link to existing issues and how the financing is done is hence an aspect to further improve.

While certain aspects may simply not have been mentioned by the interviewees, it is likely that other dimension cannot be utilized by some members. They may not know that they could, or the respective structures within the network do not allow it in an efficient way, as may be the case for joint marketing and public relations. As LEEB (2022) describes, simple measures, such as AtY-signs at the entrances of towns, more active press work or activist engagement, by supporting for example local movements, may increase the public visibility of the network. He further points out that AtY, in his opinion, has a *“great touristic value. There shouldn’t be any leaflets without our logo on it. [...] to come to us is good because we are a city that thinks sustainably, with your visit, you support this movement [...]”* [translated]. Also NATTER (2022)

mentions „*I think it is important that there is better communication, that the municipalities carry out joint public relations. [...] it is a fact that the people forget that [the association AtY] very quickly*” [translated]. In turn, a better visibility may improve the output of the members to use the network as a voice.

Interestingly, DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) did not only research reasons to join, but also reasons *not* to join a network. These include the ability to join projects even without the network, the membership fee, already being engaged in other networks, lack of personnel, time resources and differing mentalities. While, of course, no interviews with potential prospects not wanting to join the network have been conducted in this work, reasons not to join may as well be interpreted as reasons to leave the network. Considering the fact that some former members have in fact left AtY, some of these may suggest reasons as to why this could be the case. Especially the points “lack of personnel” and “being engaged in other projects already” align with the interviews in this work, where several interviewees, especially from larger towns, have complained about the lack of time and human resources. On top of that, the membership fee might also be a deterrent factor, as for example REDLEIN (2022) explains on the question, what towns she would suggest to join the network: *“from my experience, rather smaller cities [...]. The question is, if the membership is bearable for them [...]*” [translated], further suggesting to make graduations in the fee for these.

5.2.3 Challenges of networking

Different Languages and administrative and organisational structures are mentioned most often as the challenges of networking. However, especially when it comes to language, the efforts the association is taking to offset this are regarded as particularly good, potentially as good as they could be. In fact, the associations work to translate documents and simultaneous translation during meetings is regarded as one of its biggest strengths by, for example, FISCHER (2022) and MAIER (2022). When it comes to different legislations and administrative structures, the options for associations, such as AtY, to offset this are, of course, limited.

Further challenges include the need of regular participation, as well as the internal structure (efficient communication) and external structure (marketing, outside perception). While the need to meet regularly has been established as crucial for networks, especially personal exchange, which is regarded by many of the interviewees as particularly valuable, the time and human resources of the members to make regular personal meetings are limited, given the scope and terrain of the Alps. For this, the creation of regional sub-groups has been suggested by CASTÉRA (2022). This approach is further supported by the fact that some interviewees see greater similarities to closer members, which may provide a good basis to work together.

Internally, the quality of communication and information exchange is crucial. As such, the quality of the communication channels has been criticized, including the associations website and inefficient structures of communication. Additionally, the lack of knowledge about dedicated reference people in each town, and the lack of a comprehensive archive of finished projects and topics is pointed out. In the face of lacking time resources, such structures may lead to significant losses of efficiency.

Another crucial point of discussion regards the size of the network. While, of course, no objective answer, as to what the ideal size would be, can be given, the results from the interview

suggest that a smaller size of members be beneficial. With the close relations and the familiarity of the association being its biggest strength, outweighing the aim of being politically significant on international stage, which would certainly increase with size, the need to stay relatively small is apparent. If growing, *“sustainable growth”*, as framed by (NATTER 2022) seems to be a reasonable course, wherein the strengthening of existing links is prioritized over growth. On the other hand, however, it has been shown that innovativeness and openness to the outside is one of the key components of a functioning network. This is naturally provided in the case of AtY, as HOLZEGGER (2022) points out: *“It is no closed network, this results from the fact that there is a new Alpine Town every year.”* [translated]

5.2.4 Thematic Areas

Thematically, the association works within the framework of the AlpCon, following its “five goals” (awareness, participation, regional development, sustainability, cooperation). It therefore aims to contribute to the implementation of the AlpCon on lower level, adding to the broader goal of sustainable development in the Alps. Looking at challenges the region is facing to date, environment protection, climate crisis, demographic change and mobility appear to be the most pressing, with others connected to these.

The interviews show that all the Case study towns aim to implement measures towards sustainable development, with “sustainable tourism”, “sustainable mobility” and “sustainable development” in general being the most prominently mentioned topics. While naturally, no single town, or network of towns is able to solve any of the overarching projects, it is suggested that the AT may also act as role models.

As some of the towns enter the association with specific problems in mind, such as Passy (Air quality), Idrija (demographic development, youth emigration) and Brig (NEAT Lötschberg Project), providing expertise and best-practice in specialised disciplines appears to be the main expectation. In terms of projects, any smaller or bigger initiative is welcomed, as raising the awareness in the population seems to be the most important with these.

5.2.5 Added value

In the following, the previous chapter is summarized into the most important added value a network, by the example of AtY, provides for its members.

- 1) The membership in a network provides an increase in the social capital of an actor, enabling a wider array of action. This includes the influx of outside information, Know-How and experiences.
- 2) Through the network, actors are able to reach other actors, who would otherwise be out of range. As, for example NATTER (2022) describes that, while there would usually be no way to know what far-away places (in this case Passy) are doing, the network shows that there are similar challenges and enables exchange.
- 3) The increase of political weight and the ability to be known internationally as, for example, AT, is a key factor of networks. While, overall, in the case of AtY, this appears to be a less relevant factor, the example of Sonthofen (CH. 4.1.3) shows that international visibility can be a factor. Moreover, literature shows that the effect can be relevant for municipalities.

- 4) As DEL BIAGGIO (2016a) shows, expertise from networks can be used to justify and boost sustainable projects within a city. In the case of AtY, it is mentioned, for example in the case of Villach or Sonthofen, that the admittance to the network has resulted in a strengthening of sustainability-movements within the municipality, leaving a lasting impact.
- 5) Networks enable the building of personal and lasting relationships, especially when in-person meetings are performed. The members profit not only from the increase of social capital, but also, the exchange of "tacit knowledge" is enabled.
- 6) Culturally different traditions and ways of living are exchanged, improving the personal knowledge and the pan-Alpine cohesion. Especially long-time members, such as Sonthofen, point out the personal value of this.
- 7) Exchange of experiences and Know-How is performed. This can also happen by mutual visits and on-sight inspections of certain projects, as mentioned for example by Sonthofen, Brixen or Brig.
- 8) Connected to the increase of SC, the network enables the finding of project partners.
- 9) The network presents a collection of projects, in which the actor can take part in. Ideally, also an archive of finished projects exists, from which a member can draw expertise from.
- 10) The admittance and membership in a network like AtY do provide the opportunity to raise the awareness of a certain agenda, in this case sustainable development, in the local population. The examples of Villach and Brixen show that this effect has taken place.
- 11) The network provides the member with access to funds, which may otherwise be unavailable or unknown. The AT Brig-Glis is, for example, funded with a fixed amount of money by the municipality annually, which can be used for related projects of all kinds. Furthermore, DEL BIAGGIO (2016) shows examples of town leaders which emphasize that certain funds would not have been available or known of, if they hadn't been part of the network.
- 12) The collection of towns enables a joint marketing strategy, which in turn has much higher weight than individual ones. Especially smaller towns can profit from this international recognition.
- 13) The organisation of an Event can provide an economic benefit for the town.

5.3 Recommended strategies.

At last, recommended strategies are derived from the two question above:

Which recommendations and strategies for AtY and comparable associations can be derived from the above?

While the recommendations are targeted on the case study, AtY, they may as well be helpful for any comparable association, which naturally work along the same principles. This section is separated into six categories, each containing more concrete actions.

1) Communication

- a. The constant re-production of connections is crucial. It must be ensured that a regular exchange of knowledge and experiences is provided. As personal meetings provide a particular layer of connection, such meetings should be organised in regular intervals.
- b. The quality of exchange is of particular importance. As network members naturally suffer from lack of time and personnel resources, communication channels must be readily available and efficient.
- c. Exchange can also happen via non-direct communication, for example by an archive of finished and on-going projects or a register of particular expertise, any town provides. An easily available platform or exchange tool for the members may be helpful in this regard.
- d. Regional sub-meetings and groups can offer a way for regular exchange, without having to make the effort of including the whole scope of the Alps. While this is supported by the fact that many members tend to work with closer town more easily anyways, it is crucial not to neglect the network-wide exchange on regular basis as well.

2) Innovativeness

- a. In order to maintain its ability to provide innovative solutions for its members, the network needs to make sure to stay open to the outside. Connections to other networks, as existing, need to be maintained.
- b. The habit of electing a new member town each year proves to be a great way of assuring the networks innovativeness and should be carried forward.
- c. The diversity of the members can provide different points of views. Active approaching of members, which are outside of the existing clusters of towns should be pursued.

3) Internal Organisation

- a. The small size of the network is perceived as one of its biggest strengths. The familiarity of the network needs to be pursued. A strategy of "sustainable growth" should be applied, wherein the strengthening of existing links should be prioritised over expansion.
- b. The network is highly reliant on individuals. Effort should be made to diversify responsibilities and prepare for the inevitable departure of individuals. Especially within towns, more than one person should be engaged within the project.
- c. Different languages and administrative structures are regarded as the biggest challenges. The well-functioning measures to offset these must be continued.

4) External Visibility

- a. The visibility of the network is arguably limited. Members would benefit from an increase in various instances, as raising awareness in the population is one of the key expectations of the network by its members.
- b. Fairly small measures may help the networks visibility, such as more prominent promotion within the towns itself, via presenting the logo in different instances. Comparably substantial improvement may be possible by relatively small efforts of the member towns.
- c. Joint marketing and public relations should be further expanded. A combined marketing strategy and mutual promotion of the member towns may be options.
- d. Projects need to be visible on citizen level, to make sure, the local population understands, what the association is doing.

5) Thematic focus

- a. A clear thematic focus is necessary to strengthen the networks position. It needs to be clear, what part within the assemblage of pan-Alpine organisations is taken up by AtY. While the five goals provide a solid basis, the particular strengths of the network must be focused on and presented more prominently.
- b. The five objectives of the association do not represent the unique characteristic of AtY, also as compared to other networks. The objectives need to either be revised or complemented.
- c. The award AT may hold a large touristic value. As many members want to engage in "sustainable tourism", focusing more on this strand could be a way to go forward for the association.
- d. The scope of "sustainability" is very broad. Focusing on a particular aspect each year (similar to the AlpCon two-year presidency work program) may be helpful.
- e. A definition of the term "sustainability" as well as a clear vision for the future can help members, as well as outsiders, to understand, where the projects, and the association as a whole, is heading.

6) Projects

- a. The ability for towns to initiate projects on their own is limited. To engage members in these, they must be as clear and well-prepared as possible, in order for them to fit them efficiently into existing organisational structures.
- b. A platform, where towns with similar interests or challenges can easily connect and possibly set up a project may be helpful. However, the assistance of the association administration in this is necessary.
- c. A comprehensive archive of past projects and gained Know-How must be set up.

5.4 Comparison to previous works

While Alpine networks have been investigated in detail for example by BÄTZING (2015b; BEHRINGER (2003); DEBARBIEUX et al. (2015); DEBARBIEUX (2009); DEL BIAGGIO (2016a; 2015; 2011; 2010; 2009; PERLIK (2019b; 2001), the association AtY has not been on the focus of research recently. Comparing this work to the investigation of previous studies, however, several similarities can be observed. For once, the increasing importance of mountain regions, and in this context the Alps, as transnational entities have been noted. While networks are found to be an essential driver of this, it is pointed out by DEL BIAGGIO (2011) that national and supranational levels (e.g. the EU) still have great influence on the ability of smaller networks. The administrative and financial boundaries, these entities provide for the networks in question, are noted in this work as well. Furthermore, the reliability of these networks on single people is described by DEL BIAGGIO (2011: 126) to *“diminish the impact of the project for the Alpine ecoregion to become a real political entity”*, which aligns with findings of this thesis as one of the biggest weak spots of the networks.

Looking more specifically on AtY, previous dissertations from BAUMGARTNER (2010); BUCHL (2010) have dealt with similar topics as this work. Other works, such as KÜBLER (1998; NEUGEBAUER (1998); PERLIK 1998) date back to the very beginning of AtY, thus providing limited ground for comparison.

Similarly to this thesis, BUCHL (2010) and BAUMGARTNER (2010) have also derived recommendations for action. In this, BUCHL (2010) focuses on the ability of AtY as an instrument to implement the AlpCon, focusing also on sustainability and regional development, while BAUMGARTNER (2010) investigates AtY as a form of city-regional governance. BUCHL (2010) argues that no general model for sustainable development can be derived, which, as she argues, is a good thing, as such a model might hinder the process, which should be kept open. While this thesis agrees with the fact that no general approach on sustainability can be observed, contrarily, it is argued that a clearer definition of what the term means, would benefit the network. Both works, as well as this thesis, agree on the importance of networks for the pan-Alpine governance.

Recommendations include stronger awareness-building, thematic focus (AlpCon), internal and external marketing (BUCHL 2010), strengthening the exchange of experiences, joint public relations work and the use of new media (e.g. Social Media) (BAUMGARTNER 2010). While this work uses a different point of view (network theory), and is published some decade later, major similarities arise. Besides the fairly straightforward need to strengthen information exchange and awareness building, interestingly, also the need for a better joint marketing has stayed the unchanged. When it comes to the use of new media, many innovations have been introduced in the last decade (social media, new website, Online conferences), but the need to further invest in innovative technology remains. Conclusively, despite the temporal difference of the works, it is clear that many of the challenges of AtY, and the Alpine networks altogether, have stayed the same. The different approach of the work, as well as the improved technical possibilities of our time do, however, provide an extended set of measures to be taken.

6. CONCLUSION

The Alpine region, consisting of a manifold assembly of countries, regions, and other administrative divisions, is considerably shaped by transnational institutions. These focus most prominently on sustainable development, which makes sense, as this is not only the most urgent topic, but also one that can effectively be tackled by network-like structures.

The two most important strands in this regard are EU- and AlpCon-related networks. The role of CIPRA in this context cannot be overstated, which was, among other things, responsible for introducing lower-level networks like AtY or AiA to the region. These provide a crucial role in connecting the higher level AlpCon and lower-level local individuals and initiatives, thus connecting the two-fold impetus of pan-Alpine institutionalisation.

The association Alpine Town of the Year is an important and active member of the pan-Alpine assemblage of organisations. It focuses specifically on the connection of municipalities and aims to boost the implementation of the Alpine Convention on citizen level. Its specific characteristic, as opposed to similar organisations, is its small size and the familiar atmosphere. As the title of the association suggests, it further aims to take action by example, act as role-models.

As the empirical research shows, besides the usual, straight-forward issues, such as time and human resources, communication, and financing, its two biggest strengths, its small, family-like structure and its thematic focus, are simultaneously its greatest challenges. The smallness of the network naturally leads to dependence on single individuals, which weakens its connectivity and overall structure. Furthermore, the small size limits its visibility, both locally and on international stage. Thematically, AtY relies on its five objectives and the AlpCon. These do provide a good basis for action, do not, however, present a complete picture, as to what the association is actually doing, and what its unique values are.

In order to move forward, the association needs to assess and strengthen its internal structure, for which the fundamental rules of network theory are helpful. The thematic objectives need to be either revised or complemented by an additional mission statement, as the thematic focus is one of the crucial aspects of network building. The objectives "Awareness", "Participation", "New Partnerships" and, most importantly, its aim to take action "by example" all rely heavily on its public visibility, which therefore needs to be strengthened. This may already be improved by small measures both from the association and its members. A further consideration is a stronger focus on "sustainable tourism", which is likely to fit the associations' structure well.

Conclusively, AtY plays a small, but not insignificant role in the development of the Alpine region, which is likely to increase in the years to come. Its approach is fundamentally sensible but needs to be sharpened further. Similarly, most networks in the Alps, and in mountain regions in general, are experiencing an increase in importance, which is associated with an increase in responsibility.

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APPENDIX

Interview 1: Passy

Th., 21.04.2022 – 9:00-10:00am, via Zoom.

Participants: Raphael **CASTÉRA** (Mayor of Passy), Juliette **VODINH** (external employee who works for Passy, especially in terms of ATY-related issues.), Pierre Oliver **CARRA** (technical employee at the municipality of Passy), Zoé **SERRE** (Intern at the municipality of Passy).

The answers were mostly provided in French and then translated by Zoe SERRE into English. In the following, only the English translations are transcribed. Translated parts are written in *italic*, with the original speaker in Brackets.

Introduction

Raphael: I am Raphael Castéra, I am the mayor of Passy since 2021.

Zoe [Pierre]: Pierre Oliver Sarra is the general director of all the services and technical agencies in the municipality of Passy.

Zoe [Juliette]: Juliette Vodinh is an external stakeholder who work specifically on the AT network in Passy.

Zoe: I am just an internee in Passy – for now [laughs].

A) Short questions

A1) How do you know about the network?

Zoe [Raphael]: Under the last mayor, Raphael got the knowledge of the network through Juliette, which is how it started in 2017, after pollution issues came up to the surface.

Zoe [Juliette]: Juliette knows a former chair of AT, and they discussed together pollution issues in 2017, when they took a field trip to Tyrol together.

A2) So explained how you knew about the network and what the problem was – but what was the decisive reason you joined the network?

Raphael: In 2017, there were big amount of pollution here in Passy and there was a big problem with the population, a big strike, 2000 persons. The former team was not very aware of the problem, which is why they called Juliette to work on that problem and to find solutions.

Zoe: That's what triggered the entry in the network.

A3) Later on, we will also talk about how AtY could help you with this problem – but maybe for now we go on with the questions. Is Passy part of any other transnational network on the alpine region?

Raphael: For international, it's the only one.

What about ALPARC? In connection to the nature reserve.

Zoe [Juliette]: The natural reserve itself is part of the network, but not the municipality itself, so part of the territory is related to it, but not the entirety.

B) Alpine Town of the Year

B1) Okay! Well let's move on then to the next part. What input is Passy providing to the network?

Zoe [Raphael]: So far Passy remains kind of modest. In the first period of time, we would like to get inspired by other cities. So in the first phase, it will be getting to know each other, getting inspired from each other.

The city works a lot on air quality issues, that includes schemes to support individual households to change for example their heating systems. There is also a lot of work put into what is called "municipal kitchen", where we work together with local producers and short circuits. There we aim to cook better food for schools and retired people's homes. Firstly Biella, in general Italian towns, but in particular Biella were interested in the "municipal kitchen" idea. Another access of action is on natural spaces, because there is a real problem of over-visiting and over-crowding of these natural spaces. So we are thinking of solutions to work on this problem and its consequences.

And there is an important aspect as well: that of culture and alpine identity. Passy has a lot of buildings and history dating back to the 20th century and we hope to provide experience on how to manage such heritage and how to evaluate and share it with the other alpine towns and the inhabitants of Passy as well.

So you mentioned a lot of projects you are doing, especially when it comes to Air quality. To you think you could initiate projects facing such issues in the future with other alpine towns together, who might experience similar problems?

Raphael: For sure! It was the example of Bolzano, the trip led by Juliette in 2017, which was an example for us to work on this subject.

Zoe [Raphael]: So we are a group of cities that work together in the area, called "the community of municipalities", if translated literally, and we work all work together on pollution problems.

Who is part of this "community of municipalities"? Is that French towns?

Zoe: Yes. Its french towns from the area, 10 altogether.

Zoe [Juliette]: So one of the big steps is changing heating systems – yes - and also renovating the buildings to save energy and increase production of energy That is something that has been discussed with AtY. It was first a reflection from the French towns and it was shared at the general assembly last year in Chamonix in October, with the aim of making it one of the main goals of AT. One of the main issues with this is, how do we evaluate the outcome, how do we put numbers on it, to produce tangible result both for the population and the municipality to see we're at.

One of the main issues is heating. And we talk about this because it's the main cause of "fine particles" and air pollution. And that's the case in Switzerland, Italy, France ... Austria. Especially in alpine regions, with the phenomenon of thermal inversion. We've just finished a document which summarizes all the actions planned for 2022. It's just been translated into English and sent to Magdalena, with the hope that she shares it with other alpine towns.

To add to the part about culture. Passy has an important medieval heritage, which makes it stand out compared to other AT based on tourism. The built heritage is really something special about Passy and it has an influence on the identity of the town. It is one of the things that make Passy so specific.

Talking about identity: do you think that the network could also be something to strengthen the common alpine identity?

Raphael: I don't think so.

[group discusses in French]

Zoe: We don't think so, because one of the strengths of the ATY network is the differences of the towns and their identity. It would be a shame for them if they became one and the same. What makes the network so important is the differences between the cities and at the same time the common problems that we have. It's this combination that makes it such a powerful network.

And if I may add personally: I think regionally, since Passy, Annecy and Chamonix are all part of the network, it would not be enough to try to make it a unified AT identity because it's too spread out and ... it's not the goal. Even different towns in the valley have different identities.

B2) So the next question is about what Passy takes out of the network. You have mentioned already a few things like, getting inspirations and doing projects together, but maybe you can explain a little bit more what you aim to get out of the network?

Raphael: For me it's mainly to share common experiences. We have a tough problem about transport for our visitors. It's a big problem also for Italy and Austria. We want to share different points of view. For me, that's the main goal.

Zoe [Juliette]: Every two years, the country at the head of the AC changes, so for example, this year it's Switzerland. There is the intent to do an evaluation on the work that has been done on international transportation. Maybe that would be something to emphasize within the network a bit more, to raise awareness.

B3) So when it comes to networking, organizing events, projects and so on, what are major challenges or barriers to overcome?

Zoe [Raphael]: So the first one would be the language, especially with German and Slovenian. The second point is to have a dedicated technician in very town or representative, who would be expert on ATY related issues who we know we can talk to. That's one thing that is lacking currently from our pint. And the third point is to have regular meetings. There are the general assemblies two times a year, but they are far away usually and take a lot of time. So, to have shorter exchanges a little bit more often would be a lighter process.

Zoe [Juliette]: One of the major difficulties is the distance between the towns. For example, Working with close towns, towns close to us in France or even Biella in Italy several times throughout the year – and then have the general assemblies with everyone to share all these ideas more global scale. Maybe that would enable the network to get more done because we would meet more often, work on things that maybe we have more in common than with towns on the other side of the alpine arc.

R: It's a very good proposal!

Z: It's a great idea, but it's of course demanding on the side of the network. It's a heavy load of work to organise more often meetings like that.

Do you think that such regional meeting should be organized or initiated from the network or the towns itself?

Zoe [Juliette]: Because the network has the experience of organizing such meetings and they have the ability to bring together the towns, it should be the network.

I would also like to ask again about the other point that you mentioned. So you said that one difficulty is that there is not a dedicated technician to reach out to. Can you explain that in more detail?

Zoe: It's within the cities. For example, I want to work on transportation for my internship and my first question is ... hmm ... Brixen has a good network, but who do I talk to in Brixen? To the elected representative of the city? Are they involved in the ATY at all? Will they be willing to work with me? So having someone that is dedicated and well-aware of all the projects that are going on might be cool. We would suggest that there is an elected representative that is part of the elected municipal council, who is involved in day-to-day management and knows about technical aspects of land management and urban planning.

Zoe [Juliette]: It's also a matter of following up finished projects. So, some cities work on a certain project for two years and then stop. And after this time, who do we ask for the expertise of this project? About Brixen for example ... yes, they have worked on mobility a lot, but who can I ask for the results?

Another point that you mentioned was language. Is there more the network could do to overcome this barrier?

Zoe [Raphael]: The problem isn't so much during the meetings or the general assemblies, but city-to-city again. This joins what we've said already. The challenge is more about the informal times of discussion. Something useful as well, going back to the projects, would be maybe having a tab on the website on past project, on different themes of the towns. That Could be a way to keep the resources available for everyone.

Zoe [Juliette]: The website is not as operation as it could be. It is more informative than operational at the time. The website is not only for people who don't know the alpine towns, it's also for the alpine towns to use themselves and that's a little bit lacking today. Even for new potential members the site is more like a window to look at the ideas and goals and not so much on the operational things that the network does to give an idea what the network can do in fact.

B4) So unless you would like to add anything more on challenges and barriers, we could move on the next question. [pause] What do you think is the specific added value of ATY, also compared to other networks that exist?

Zoe [Raphael]: As already mentioned, because of the connection through Juliette. But also because of the connection to the alpine Convention. There are these objectives, this set of objectives, that they are practically dedicated to on the field. That is what was attractive about the network.

There is also the Alpine Alliance, that is also related to the AC. What other networks were you thinking about?

Yes, I was thinking for example about the Alpine Alliance, but there are also other networks that work on specific issues, such as ALPARC, Pro Alpina or others. These networks of course work on specific areas, which is why it was interesting to me what you think, the specific area that ATY works on is.

C) Passy

C1) So the next part is more about Passy itself. Of course, we have talked already about specific projects and problems of Passy, but maybe we can still go through again them quickly. The first question is about how ATY can help you, can help Passy with its specific problems and questions, maybe apart from the things that we have mentioned already?

Zoe [Raphael]: The experience of other towns is really key. We are thinking of the question of transport in particular. Both of international transport - but that is a question for higher-level-governance, so it's not really up to us - but what is up to us is the internal transport network within the municipality and how it influences the environment. In several parts of the town there is lack of transportation, which leads to over-crowding in parking lots. That is something we have already discussed with Slovenia for example. For us it would be helpful to have there feedback on these subjects.

Zoe [Juliette]: The matter of transportation, especially what we call the "last kilometre", is something that we have already asked Magdalena: how do we talk about it with other towns, who do we talk to? There is an event happening on this subject by Alliance in the Alps, in Slovenia in the spring, but it is not exactly targeted for the context of Passy and it is also too far for us to go. But it remains a really important question for us.

You mentioned that in terms of transport issues, it's also a question of higher-level-governance in certain aspects. Do you think the network could also be a common voice to be able to reach out to the governments?

Zoe [Raphael]: In terms of international transportation maybe, locally probably not.

C2) So moving on to the next question – the jury of ATY mentions for each of the selected town certain aspects which are especially good practice. In terms of Passy, one of these aspects is the harmonization of tourism, settlement and nature, that is being worked on in Passy. What are specific projects that Passy is doing in this context?

Zoe [Raphael]: So the skiing resort is quite small, especially compared to our neighbours, family friendly, environmentally friendly. We are currently working on the modernisation of the resort, replacing some older ski-lifts by one chair-lift, which can be used in the summer as well. So are trying to transition towards more bi-seasonal, not just winter tourism. There is an evaluation starting at the university of Chambéry on the impact of tourism on the resort. There is also a very special place called "Land-bare" just by the ski-resort. It's heavily been replanned last year, by a policy forcing people to park beforehand and implementing shuttles.

We are also aiming to show people what pedestrian walkways there are, because people tend to take their car straight away, so we want to emphasize more pedestrian walks that are easily accessible. In the natural reserve house chalet, there is an exhibition, that has been modernised last year, that shows the walkway next to the visitor centre. There used to be a medical resort in Meduassy, which is the highest part of the town, which is now closed. We are trying to convert those unused buildings to new housing and touristic housing.

Zoe [Juliette]: In Passy there is both the mountainside and the natural reserve. On the mountainside yes, there is a lot of housing, but also a lot of open green spaces, natural spaces, hedges, field left open, that offer opportunities to just walk around. Nowadays the focus is not on walking in the natural reserve anymore, but also in the more urbanised areas, the medical station. Where before people just drove to the resort, nowadays we see that people just leave their cars and enjoy walking in the more urbanised areas.

C3) Looking at the time I suggest that we move on to the next question. We have talked about issues that Passy is facing a lot. Is there any other aspect that you would like to add in this context?

Zoe [Juliette]: One difficulty to emphasize is mainly related to the topography of Passy. The valley, the mountainside and the top and all these different areas there are different hamlets, different villages. There is no common centre to all, so public transport is very complicated to draw out, which is what causes most of the transportation issues really.

D) Outlook

D1) What other towns, or what sort of towns would you suggest to join the network?

Zoe [Raphael]: In our region there is cities like Sennauche, which has similar issues as Passy with a strong economic centre in valley, but a lot of housing based on the mountainside. There is also St.-Germain, which is in front of us when we are on the mountain side, its on the other side of the valley. It is much more centred on tourism, on heavy mountain tourism. We would suggest middle-sized cities, for example, Annecy is really large, but middle-sized and with this issue of being both a valley city and these issues of having high-mountainous areas, as well as different natural spaces as well.

Do you think, these towns know about the network?

Raphael: St.-Germain does, because the mayor was here. But Sarrouche I don't think so.

Zoe [Juliette]: We were talking about Haute-Savoie, but there is also the department a little bit more to the south, which is Savoie and they also have many cities with very specifically alpine issues like industrial areas in the bottom of the valley, housing in the middle and then skiing resort on the top and they would already have experience and also benefit from being in the network. And with the issues of everyday-life and not strictly related to tourism as well.

D2) Where do you see the future of the network?

Zoe [Raphael]: The friendship between the members is key and must remain - and it is also related to the different issues shared between the members. But also, that it shouldn't get too big, 50 towns within the network would not be helpful, and slow things down probably. Maybe having these smaller communities on specific areas of the alpine arc would be helpful to remain active.

Zoe [Juliette]: One of the things that's high on the list that makes it enjoyable to work is that yes, you have meetings, but you also have lots of time during the meetings to exchange from one person to another. These informal discussions are especially interesting and informing!

Interview 2: Sonthofen

Valentin Brunner - 26.04.2022 – 10:00-12:00; Rathaus Sonthofen

Ingrid **FISCHER** (I): ist zweite Bürgermeisterin der Stadt Sonthofen und Co-Präsidentin des Vereins AdJ.

Manfred **MAIER** (M): ist Konsulent von AdJ für Sonthofen.

Einleitung

Am Anfang nochmal nur kurz zu euren Positionen in Sonthofen und bezüglich AdJ, für Protokoll sozusagen.

I: Ja, Ingrid Fischer ich bin die zweite Bürgermeisterin und in diesem Zusammenhang auch zuständig für alles was die Alpenstädte anbelangt, also alle Mitgliederversammlungen und so weiter, alles was so zu tun ist. Da lässt mir der Bürgermeister freie Hand. Das mache ich nunmehr seit 8 Jahren. Ich bin aber gleichzeitig aber auch noch gemeinsam mit Urož Brežan Co-Präsidentin vom Verein. Wir haben ganz bewusst zwei Präsidenten mit gleicher Aufgabenteilung, seit vor anderthalb Jahren, glaub ich, folgendes passiert ist: unser damaliger Präsident wurde als Bürgermeister nicht wiedergewählt und musste somit aus dem Vorstand ausscheiden, weil nur gewählte Vertreter Mitglied sein dürfen. Also standen wir ganz spontan da und mussten neu wählen. Somit haben wir das so gemacht und ich finde das ist auch eine sehr gute Arbeitsteilung. AdJ ist mir auch deshalb sehr wichtig, ich bin in Deutschland bei der Partei die Grünen, somit passt das auch thematisch sehr gut dazu. So weit mal zu mir.

M: Ich heiße Manfred Maier, ich bin Konsulent für AdJ seit 2004, also seit dem Bewerbungsjahr, quasi, vor der Verleihung 2005. Ich habe die Funktion als Konsulent, bin also sozusagen die Schnittstelle zwischen der Verwaltung und dem Verein. Ich darf also Ingrid Fischer unterstützen, bei der Arbeit, die sie schon genannt hat.

I: Ich möchte noch sagen zu Manfred Maier: ohne ihn hätte das alles so nicht funktioniert, er hat wirklich ganz viel Ahnung von rechtlichen Dingen und das ist natürlich wichtig, dass alles bei einem Verein, der ja in Deutschland seinen Sitz hat und nach deutschem Recht funktioniert, alle seinen rechten Weg geht.

A) Kurzfragen

A1) Das trifft sich sehr gut, dass du schon so lange dabei bist, Manfred, denn bezüglich der nächsten Frage gehen wir zunächst zum Beitrittsjahr zurück. Was war 2005 der Grund, warum sich Sonthofen entschieden hat, dem Verein beizutreten bzw. sich für den Titel AdJ zu bewerben?

M: Wir hatten damals gerade einen recht neuen Bürgermeister, dem hat die Idee sofort gefallen. Wir haben uns dann nicht nur einmal sondern sogar zweimal beworben. Wir sind zunächst nicht zum Zug bekommen, aber wir haben dann beschlossen nochmal nachzulegen und haben dann den Zuschlag bekommen. Wir wollten damals international tätig werden, vor allem auch was Nachhaltigkeit betrifft.

Weißt du, woher ihr damals von dem Verein gewusst habt?

M: Das war damals allgemein ausgeschrieben, dass man sich bewerben kann als AdJ.

I: Da muss ich kurz nachfragen, weil ich das gar nicht gewusst habe. Da wurde damals öffentlich ausgeschrieben?

M: Ja das war im Internet damals! Der Bürgermeister war damals begeistert und hat sofort gesagt das machen wir!

Das wird ja heutzutage nicht mehr so gemacht? Also öffentlich ausgeschrieben?

I: Es ist auf der Homepage vom Verein drauf. Und natürlich ist es auch so, dass wir als Alpenstadt, also Sonthofen, oder die Geschäftsstelle, andere Städte anschreiben, ob sie Interesse haben. Da haben wir auch einige Städte angeschrieben, das war vor Corona, dann ist das alles etwas eingeschlafen, aber jetzt werden wir das wieder aufnehmen und diese Städte nochmal anschreiben. Aber auch die Geschäftsstelle ist da sehr aktiv, dass sie andere Städte anschreibt!

A2) Zu den potenziellen neuen Mitgliedstädten können wir auch gerne später nochmal kommen, gehen wir aber zunächst mit den Fragen weiter. Innerhalb des Netzwerkes, mit welchen Städten kooperiert Sonthofen am nächsten? Kann man sagen, dass regional näherliegende Städte oder Städte im deutschen Sprachraum sind?

I: Also es ist leider so, dass es in Deutschland nur zwei Alpenstädte gibt, Bad Reichenhall und Sonthofen. In Deutschland ist es so dass, nicht jeder Ort eine Stadt ist. Das heißt es gibt Marktgemeinden, die sind aber keine Städte, in Italien und in anderen Ländern ist das anders. In Deutschland muss man zur Stadt erhoben werden. Wir haben die Satzung aber insofern geändert, dass wir auch andere Orte anschreiben können, denn der Begriff Stadt ist ja nicht an die Einwohnerzahl gebunden. Da gibt es zum Beispiel Garmisch-Partenkirchen, das ja gar nicht so klein ist.

Also da wurden die Regeln des Vereins dahingehend geändert?

I: Wir haben geändert, dass man quasi eben auch Marktgemeinden anschreiben kann. Garmisch ist zum Beispiel auch ein Ort, der das sein könnte.

Aber es ging ja auch um die Zusammenarbeit mit den anderen Städten. Wir waren eigentlich in gutem Kontakt mit Bad Reichenhall, allerdings ist das jetzt mit dem Ausscheiden des Herrn Denner, der das dort gemacht hat, etwas zum Erliegen gekommen. Die Zusammenarbeit ist vor allem mit italienischen Städten sehr gut, z.B. Brixen, was ja auch von der Entfernung her zu handeln ist. Da

war auch der Bürgermeister schon Mal zum Stadtfest eingeladen. Z.B. auch mit Belluno und Biella. Aber auch mit Tolmin und Idrija, auch dadurch bedingt das jetzt ja Urož Co-Präsident ist. Weniger Kontakt haben wir leider mit der Schweiz, Herisau ist ja nicht weit weg, aber da ist es auch so, dass die Betreuerin des Projekts in Ruhestand gegangen ist. Mit Brig hat sich's jetzt wieder ein bisschen intensiver gestaltet, dadurch, dass eben auch die Alpenwochen dieses Jahr stattfinden sollen. Ich bin im Februar jetzt mal dort gewesen., Die haben auch eine neue Mitarbeiterin, die das jetzt betreut, nachdem dort auch der vorherige Zuständige in Ruhestand gegangen ist. Aber da kam jetzt jemand nach, die auch Interesse daran hat und der Bürgermeister eigentliche auch. Aber bedingt durch die Entfernung ist es natürlich so, dass man sich da jetzt nicht jedes Jahr austauscht.

M: Was wir sehr gerne machen, ist das wir die Städte auch einladen, z.B. Zum Alpenfest, da war Brig schon mit dabei, Tolmin und weitere ...

I: Tolmin, Morbegno, Brixen, Herisau aus der Schweiz ...

Das sind dann Initiativen von euch, dass ihr diese Städte dann einladet?

I: Ja, aber diese Initiativen gibt es auch von anderen Städten. Die italienischen Städte machen ja auch sehr gerne mal Stadtfeste. Wir waren Mal, das war auch sehr schön, in Tolmezzo, auf einem speziellen Landwirtschaftsfest, wo alle Bauern und Erzeuger auf einem riesigen Markt präsentieren konnten. Da konnte man dann auch einkaufen ... was wir dann auch getan haben.

Also solche Sachen, da sind wir dann schon auch mal unterwegs. Also diese Initiativen gibt es von allen Städten, aber da muss man sagen, dass da die Italiener besonders aktiv sind.

A3) Dann kommen wir zur nächsten Frage. Ist Sonthofen auch Mitglied bei anderen Netzwerken im Alpenraum?

I: Wir sind noch Mitglied bei Allianz in den Alpen. Dann noch bei Konvent der Bürgermeister, bei CIPRA sind wir nicht Mitglied aber haben eine sehr enge Verbindung. Dann auch bei der Alpenkonvention selbst, ich bin da beim Arbeitskreis mehrjähriges Programm dabei. Dann sind wir natürlich auch in Deutschland bei einige Dingen mit Naturschutz, und in diese Richtung, Mitglied. Aber international ist das eben Allianz in den Alpen, die ja eine ähnliche Struktur haben, die auch unterschiedliche Städte betreuen. Wir sind auch im Moment bei der ARE mit in dem Projekt dabei, Climate Action, und jetzt auch noch haben wir uns beteiligt an einem EU-Projekt, wo es einfach auch um Verkehr geht. Das läuft auch über ein Büro das uns da betreut, da ist jetzt Mal der erste Call eingereicht. Das wäre sehr schön, weil wir da eine geförderte Stelle einrichten könnte.

M: Also eigentliche Mitgliedschaft, wie gesagt bei Allianz in den Alpen aber auch engen Kontakt mit der Alpenkonvention in Innsbruck. Viele Jugendliche aus Sonthofen sind auch bei YPac mit dabei.

I: YPac wurde ja in dem Jahr gegründet, in dem wir Alpenstadt waren! Da ist unser Gymnasium also auch sehr aktiv. Vielleicht noch zum Konvent der Bürgermeister, das ist ja ganz interessant, weil unser damaliger Bürgermeist, der Hubert Buhl, sehr aktiv ist, und der ist da immer noch dabei! Aber da ist es natürlich auch so, dass die Bürgermeister in Ruhestand gehen und neue kommen.

M: Da gab es damals eine Absichtserklärung, zu Nachhaltigkeit, Klimaschutz, aber ohne konkreten Aktionsplan. Das ist damals aber komplett an mir vorbei gegangen.

A4) Dann gehen wir auch gleich weiter. Wie würdet ihr das sehen, inwieweit sieht sich Sonthofen als Teil einer grenzüberschreitenden alpinen Gemeinschaft oder Identität?

I: Ich würde sagen wir sehen das schon so. Gerade hier, wo wir leben, sind wir ja schon sehr nahe an anderen Alpenländern dran, wir sind ja so gesehen fast eine Enklave in Deutschland. Nach uns kommt noch Obersdorf, eine Marktgemeinde, noch so ein Kandidat, aber danach hört die Straße auf. Und daher sehe ich es schon sehr wichtig, dass man sich mit den Bereichen um sich herum austauscht, Da sehe ich schon eine sehr wichtige Verbindung. Leider ist es in manchen Dingen so, dass wenig übernommen wird aus anderen Gebieten. Wir sind ja sehr nahe dran an Vorarlberg, am Bregenzerwald, die uns in vielen Dingen auch etwas voraus sind, weil die eben auch einfach eine andere Einstellung zu Natur haben. Also da würde ich mit schon wünschen, das noch mehr übernommen wird, weil ich einfach glaube, dass die manchen Dinge machen, die wir vielleicht irgendwann auch machen könnten. Ich glaube, dass es sehr wichtig, dass man über die Grenze schaut, weil die Grenze ist im Prinzip etwas, das ist halt auf dem Papier festgelegt. Man sieht ja gerade aktuell wie verbunden wir alle sind.

M: Da gibt es dann einfach Situationen, wenn man sich trifft, wo man sieht, dass man ähnlich Probleme hat, z.B. Aha, du hast auch Probleme mit Mountainbike-Tourismus, oder Abfalltrennung. Da sieht man einfach wie eng man verbinden ist, gleiche Landschaft, gleiche Probleme. Dass man sagt, Mensch, wir sitzen da alle im gleichen Boot!

I: Wobei es schon so ist, dass andere Länder manche Dinge schneller lösen, unproblematischer lösen. Aber ich denke das ist ein deutsches Problem, weil da eben alles ganz, ganz streng geregelt ist, mit ganz vielen Formularen, und das bremst eben auch viele Dinge ein. Oft ist kein Erfolg zu sehen, es dauert sehr lange. Aber das ist sicher etwas, was wir mit AdJ nicht ändern können, das müssten wir als ganze Land ändern .. das kann man sich wünschen.

B) Alpenstadt des Jahres

B1) Gut. Dann können wir auch zum nächsten Teil weitergehen, der dann eher zum Verein selbst und den Abläufen ist. Welchen Input leistet Sonthofen in dem Netzwerk? Ihr habt ja schon erwähnt das ihr zum Beispiel andere Städte einladet

...

I: Also das ist, wie gesagt, sicher ein wichtiges Ding, das man so ein Alpenfestival macht, war aber natürlich Anfang dieses Jahres noch nicht so klar, einfach weil man nicht weiß, wie sich die Dinge entwickeln. Wir geben natürlich auch unsere Erfahrung, die wir haben gerne weiter, über Berichte, die über die Homepage vom Verein da sind, oder über Vorträge über bestimmte Dinge, das gibt es also auch das wir eingeladen werden bei einer CIPRA. Was auch oft vorkommt ist, da wir auch Radstadt - wir sind seit 2019 Radstadt - ein Titel wie Alpenstadt, den man sich verdienen muss - da sind wir schon auch gefragt worden, was wir da tun. Mountainbike-Tourismus ist da auch ein Problem, weil es in Deutschland, im Gegensatz zu Österreich, eben das freie Betrittsrecht für all gibt – das vereinfacht natürlich manche Sachen, aber das ist ein Problem für uns. Also da werden wir schon öfter angefragt.

Wo wir auch immer wieder nachgefragt werden, ist die Jugendarbeit. Wir haben seit 1996 ein Jugendparlament. Das gibt es in anderen Alpenstädten nicht häufig. Bei uns läuft das im Großen und Ganzen sehr gut. Zu dem Jugendparlament war ich auch mal in Brig, die haben auch ein Jugendparlament gegründet, und da bin ich mit drei Jugendlichen hingefahren, und haben mit ihnen unsere Erfahrungen geteilt. Natürlich dort mit anderen Voraussetzungen wie bei uns, weil da einfach mehr Geld vorhanden ist. Also ja, solche Dinge, da werden wir gefragt und die geben wir auch sehr gerne weiter.

Ganz aktiv jetzt, dass wir eigene Projekte vorschlagen, da habe ich jetzt nichts im Kopf. Aber es ist so, dass viele Projekte, die gelaufen sind, dass die Anfrage da zunächst bei uns kommt, von der CIPRA oder der ARE. Wenn du da mal drinnen bist in einem Verteiler, da kommen oft Leute zu dir. Das Problem ist aber, dass wir das natürlich personell oft einfach nicht stemmen können.

M: Ein großer Input ist natürlich auch dass die Frau Fischer Vorstandsmitglied ist in dem Verein, dass man eben auch ganz viele Reisen unternimmt. Wir sind auch der offizielle Sitz des Vereins, das heißt die Post kommt auch zu uns. Rechtsfragen werden auch von uns bearbeitet ...

I: ... vor allem von Manfred ...

M: Formalien, und so weiter. Also ganz konkrete Dienstleistungen für den Verein. Das sind natürlich ganz wichtige Inputs von uns.

I: Aber ich denke, es ist schon auch so, dass wir alle, die im Vorstand sind, ganz bestimmte Dinge einbringen, jeder irgendwo da wo er oder sie es auch kann. Das ist, wie ich finde auch sehr schön, weil wir da sehr gut zusammenarbeiten als Team.

B2) Die nächste Frage bezieht sich im Prinzip auf das Gleiche, nur umgekehrt. Welche Outputs zieht ihr aus dem Netzwerk? Wofür verwendet ihr das Netzwerk?

I: Was ich vorhin bereits gesagt habe, dass man eben aus Erfahrungen von andern lernt und da eben auch mal was mitnimmt. Das muss gar kein riesiges Ding sein, manchmal sind es die Kleinigkeiten, die Dinge besser laufen lassen. Da ist eben der Austausch das Wichtigste. Nicht nur der Austausch auf den Mitgliederversammlung, der eben besonders wichtig ist, weil da auch der persönliche Austausch dabei ist, sondern auch bei verschiedenen Videokonferenzen. Also noch mal, wir könnten schon lernen, manche Dinge konkreter anzugehen, aber da spricht eben manches dagegen. Dass ist eben wie, wenn du sagst, da nimm' ich jetzt einen Nagel und einen Hammer, und hänge das Bild auf, und der andere sagt, neh da müssen wir zuerst noch ausmessen!

M: Das spannende ist auch, die internationale Wahrnehmung. Sonthofen ist eine Alpenstadt, das steht auch in Berichten. Da kommen auch Leute auf dich zu, wegen dieses Titels, zuletzt zum Beispiel die Stiftung Allgäu Hochalpen. Man leistet auch einem Beitrag zum europäischen Geschehen und man kann Sonthofen dadurch natürlich auch international etwas bekannter machen. Und Nachhaltigkeit natürlich, ein ganz wichtiger Aspekt.

Wenn man also jetzt hier über höherrangige Probleme spricht, wie ihr erwähnt habt, Dinge, die sich in Deutschland generell ändern müssen, oder auch Verkehr, der ja auch oft in höherrangige Zuständigkeit fällt, kann da der Verein, als Zusammenschluss mehrerer kleinerer Gemeinden oder Städten, auch eine Art Sprachrohr sein, um von höheren Instanzen auch gehört zu werden?

I: Ja, das ist schon so. In Deutschland etwa beim Bundesamt für Umwelt oder beim Umweltbundesamt, das sind ja zwei verschiedene Institutionen, da ist der Verein durchaus bekannt. Da wird auch mit dem Verein zusammengearbeitet, es gab persönliche Treffen und es wird auch Wert darauf gelegt, dass sich der Verein auch äußert. Das ist auch bei der Alpenwoche so, in der Schweiz, wo wir als Verein auch eine Stimme haben und uns auch einbringen können. Ich habe mich, als ich in Brig war, auch getroffen mit denen. Und nächste Woche ist nochmal eine Videoschaltung, wo ich dabei sein werde und Magdalena auch. Auch in der EU ist es so, dass der Verein bei bestimmten Projekten auch bekannt ist. Also jetzt nicht wie ein Riesenkonzern, aber es gibt auch Nischen, welche bestimmte Dinge machen, wo der Verein dann besprochen wird ... geht ja auch oft um Fördergelder.

Und wie Manfred auch gesagt hat, es wirkt sich schon so aus, dass man da als Mitleid im Verein auch Einzelanfragen bekommt. Aber das größere Gewicht des Vereins, ja das zählt schon was.

Also der Titel Alpenstadt bzw. die Mitgliedschaft wird von anderen auch gesehen?

I: Ja! Ich empfinde es schon so. Wenn Anfragen kommen, heißt es da nicht, Liebe Frau Bürgermeisterin, sondern geht es an den Verein. Kommt ja dann auch hier in der Geschäftsstelle an.

M: Es ist ja auch so, wenn eine Stadt Alpenstadt wird, dann tut sich die Bevölkerung zusammen, dann wird die Stadt geschmückt. Man erhofft sich natürlich einen touristischen Aufschwung, man denkt jetzt kommen die Leute! Da gibt es dann schon immer auch eine Aufbruchstimmung.

I: Da muss man natürlich schon ehrlicherweise zugeben, dass es auch da ein Auf und Ab gibt. Erstmal ist das alles ganz toll, aber dann ist man erst Mal so Puhh ... aber ich denke das ist ganz normal. Diese Kapazitäten können natürlich nicht dauernd auf 10 sein.

M: Was eben auch Frau Fischer gesagt hat, dass man eben nicht nur Projekte EU-weit hat, sondern auch in der Bevölkerung.

Wäre interessant zu wissen, ist natürlich jetzt eine andere Frage, aber wie viele Leute in Sonthofen tatsächlich wissen, dass man eine Alpenstadt ist

I: Wir haben ja bei dem letzten Alpenfestival ein Quiz ausgearbeitet, 6,7,8 Fragen .. und da war ich tatsächlich erstaunt das die Leute schon bestimmte Sachen gewusst haben. Das fand ich dann doch ganz interessant. Da haben die Leute das schon ganz gut ausgefüllt. Ich möchte jetzt nicht sagen, dass die Hälfte von Sonthofen darüber Bescheid weiß, aber auf jeden Fall schon ein Teil.

B3) Wenn man jetzt zum, sozusagen, networken selbst kommt, also ich sage Mal, Umsetzten von Projekten, Zusammenarbeit und so weiter, welche Hindernisse, Hürden seht ihr da?

I: Eine Herausforderung ist natürlich die Entfernung. Bei der Zusammenarbeit musst du dich manchmal auch treffen. Das ist schon schwierig, naja, natürlich kann man mit dem Autofahren .. mit dem Zug kann man nicht alle Alpenstädte erreichen. Das würde ich mal als größtes Hindernis bezeichnen. Auch da versucht man natürlich, das so zu gestalten, dass man, wenn man sich trifft, einen großen Prozentsatz auch bespricht, der zu machen ist, und den Rest dann wieder mit E-Mail oder Video machen kann. Kleinere Hürde, das ist jetzt für jüngere Leute wie dich keine Hürde mehr - ihr sprecht alle sehr gut Englisch - mein Englisch ist jetzt nicht das super tollste, aber es ist natürlich schon ein großer Vorteil, wenn man gut Englisch kann. Da stelle ich schon fest, dass die jüngeren Menschen da ganz anders daherkommen ... das geht einfach viel besser, für euch ist es einfach selbstverständlich. Deshalb ist es vielleicht für mich eine kleinere Hürde, aber für viele andere Städte eher nicht. Das würde ich also eher als kleiner Hürde sehen ... eher schon die Entfernung.

M: Unterschiedliche Strukturen ... manche haben fünf Bürgermeister, manche drei, zwei. Auch unterschiedliche rechtliche Handhabe .. wenn der Österreicher sagt, ich habe gute Handhabe gegen übermäßigen Fahrradtourismus, dann müssen wir sagen, ja, wir nicht. Oder in Italien, wo eben ein Bürgermeister dann einfach mal abgewählt wird.

Vielleicht noch zu dem rechtlichen ... Jede Alpenstadt hat ja eine zuständige Person ... muss das aber jemand aus dem Gemeinderat sein, so wie im Vorstand, oder kann das prinzipiell jede Person sein?

M: Ganz genau, das kann grundsätzlich jeder machen. Meistens ist es natürlich jemand aus dem alltäglichen Gemeindegeschäft, der sich dann eben auch auskennt, manchmal gibt es das aber auch, dass eine externe Person angestellt wird, die sich dann nach 2,3 Jahren wieder zurückzieht. Aber es ist keine rechtliche Qualifikation notwendig.

Aber es ist festgeschrieben das jede Alpenstadt eine solche zuständige Person haben muss?

M: Ganz genau ... im Vertrag steht eben drinnen, dass eine Kontaktperson benannt werden muss, das ist dann der Konsulent, und fungiert als Schnittstelle zwischen Bürgermeister und Alpenstadt-Verein.

Vielleicht noch kurz zur Sprache ... prinzipiell wird ja, vor allem auch bei den Mitgliederversammlungen, schon sehr viel getan, um die Sprachbarriere zu überwinden ... seht ihr da noch Möglichkeiten, wie das weiter verbessert werden könnte?

I: Ich glaube dazu wird wirklich sehr viel getan. Wir haben ja eine Geschäftsführung mit der Magdalena, die sechs Sprachen spricht. Sie kann also einfach in jeder Sprache gleich einsteigen und mitreden - das fand ich echt irre - sie spricht italienisch, französisch, deutsch, alles gleichzeitig. Und natürlich auch die Simultanübersetzung bei der Versammlung - die aber meiner Meinung nach auch sehr wichtig ist, weil es da eben auch um rechtliche Dinge geht und da ist es sehr wichtig, dass das dann jeder auch exakt versteht, gerade wenn es dann um Geld und rechtliche Dingen geht. Das kostet zwar ein bisschen Geld - wobei wir jetzt ja auch festgestellt haben, dass das gar nicht vor Ort sein muss, sondern auch anders geht - ist natürlich auch eine Einsparung. Also ich wüsste eigentlich nicht, was man da mehr machen könnte, ich glaube das muss auch einfach jeder selbst machen, dass man sich da Mühe gibt und einfach auch nachfragt.

M: Und ganz wichtig ist eben auch, dass ganz offiziell festgelegt ist, dass es diese vier Alpensprachen gibt und auch die Satzung, jedes Protokoll immer in alle Sprachenübersetzt wird.

I: Ein Teil der Ausschreibung für die Geschäftsstelle ist auch gewesen, dass eben auch möglichst viele Sprachen abgedeckt sind. Slowenisch kann jetzt niemand perfekt, aber die anderen und auch Englisch schon. Aber die Slowenen, und die jungen Leute sowieso, können meistens eh sehr gut Englisch.

B4) Dann kommen wir noch zum Verein selbst ... Wo seht ihr, vielleicht auch im Vergleich zu anderen Netzwerken, ihr habt schon erwähnt Allianz in den Alpen, den speziellen Mehrwert des Vereins Alpenstadt des Jahres? Was kann dieser Verein leisten was andere vielleicht nicht können?

I: Das ist schwierig. Allianz in den Alpen macht das sehr ähnlich, vielleicht etwas kleiner strukturiert, hat also nicht diesen Stadtbe-griff. Für uns als AdJ, dass wir Projekte machen, die den Städten, die in dem Projekt mitmachen, wie viele es dann sind, 4,5, direkt für diese Städte dann einen Mehrwert bringen. Dass jede Stadt daraus dann einen Mehrwert ziehen kann, nicht überall dasselbe, aber jeder kann etwas daraus ziehen ... und dass die verschiedenen Städte dann von den anderen Städten lernen können. Wenn dann etwa ein Workshop in Tolmezzo ist, wo es darum geht, wie wird dieses Gebäude genutzt, und jeder kann sich dann einbringen - und dann kommt die nächste Stadt dran. Da sehe ich den Unterschied, dass es zwar ein gemeinsames Projekt ist, aber das jede

Stadt seinen eigenen Teil macht. Klar kann man sich dann was voneinander anschauen, den anderen zeigen was man macht, aber oft zeigt sich dann, dass manche Dinge so in anderen Städten gar nicht machbar sind. Und das ist meiner Meinung nach bei, zum Beispiel, Allianz in den Alpen anders, wo Projekte gesucht werden, wo man an einem Projekt arbeitet. Das finde ich schon den Unterschied und das finde ich auch toll. Dass jede Stadt auch individuell wahrgenommen wird, nicht alle über einen Kamm geschoren werden. Du bist Stadt A, ab diesem Wochenende, bei diesem Workshop bist jetzt du als Stadt A dran. Jeder kann für sich was lernen, aber es wird jetzt daran gearbeitet. Das finde ich sieht man bei allen Projekten – vielleicht besonders auch bei dem Projekt Tour des Villes, diesem Projekt mit den Konversionsflächen, das hat mir richtig gut gefallen.

M: Genau so sehe ich das auch, Allianz in den Alpen ist viel, viel größer, viel mehr kleine Gemeinden. Dass wir uns sehr gut untereinander kennen, das ist auch der Vorteil.

I: Genua, natürlich auch die Menschen, die dahinter stehen, dass man sich einfach auch schon seit längerer Zeit kennt ... und dadurch, dass wir weniger sind, auch die Orte, die man dann auch schon besser kennt ... dass hat schon auch was.

---- Kurze Kaffeepause ----

C) Sonthofen

C1) Zu jeder Alpenstadt des Jahres wurde ja von der Jury bewertet, welche Aspekte wurden besonders gut gemacht, meist wurden spezielle Nachhaltigkeitsprojekte hervorgehoben. Im Fall von Sonthofen wurde da speziell der Aspekt der Bürgerbeteiligung hervorgehoben, auch im Zuge des Projekts „Zukunft Sonthofen“, welche mittlerweile natürlich schon wieder in der Vergangenheit liegt. Was wurde da genau umgesetzt?

Und vielleicht auch ob in diesem Zusammenhang dann auch der Verein AdJ irgendwo eingebunden wurde oder gemeinsame Projekte initiiert wurden?

I: Ja Zukunft Sonthofen, es gibt nur eine Projektgruppe von damals, die heute noch aktiv ist. Es gab ganz viele Gruppen, aber nur eine Gruppe, die Projektgruppe Altstätten, das ist her der Nachbarort, die noch existiert. Die anderen haben sich alle mehr oder weniger aufgelöst nach einer gewissen Zeit. Altstätten ist also wieder aktiviert worden, nachdem es zuvor eine Zeit daniedergelegen war. Jetzt gibt es dort eine Umgestaltung des Ortskernes. Was ist aus diesem Projekt entstanden: also schon eine ganze Menge! In dem Alpenstadt-Jahr ist also dieser Gedanke entstanden, aus dem dann schon viele Projekte entstanden sind ..nachhaltige Welt, nachhaltige Lebensweise, nicht nur im Umwelt-Sinne sondern auch was Soziales angeht ... daraus sind wir dann auch Fair-Trade-Stadt geworden .. als 10. Stadt Deutschlands. Es ist also eine tolle Sache, dass sich das so weiterentwickelt hat - hat jetzt zwar mit Alpenstädten nicht direkt etwas zu tun. Der Fair-Trade Gedanke ist jetzt in den anderen Alpenstädten nicht so bekannt. Die finden das zwar sehr interessant, es gibt auch Slow-Food-Stäte und so weiter, aber Fair-Trade-Stadt ist jetzt nicht so bekannt.

Ja was ist noch entstanden ... da gab es etwa die Umwelt-Gruppe, die sich zum Beispiel für ein Wäldchen in Sonthofen eingesetzt hat, welches mal vorgesehen war, abgeholzt zu werden. Das hat dann, Gott sein Dank, nicht stattgefunden, und da war diese Gruppe Umwelt auch sehr aktiv, dass es das jetzt noch gibt, dieses Wäldchen. Was es auch gegeben hat aus der „Gruppe Soziale Stadt“, daraus ist die Freiwilligenagentur entstanden, die es auch heute noch gibt. Freiwilligenagentur bedeutet, da betreut man verschiedene freiwillige Initiativen. Da kann man sich als interessierter Bürger melden, wenn man zum Beispiel ein Hobby hat, wo man sich gerne einbringen möchte. Die steht mittlerweile auf eigenen Beinen, das war eben auch eine Geschichte, die in dieser Gruppe entstanden ist. Und da gibt es eben durchaus viele Dinge, wo eben zum Beispiel auch die Stadtverwaltung sagt, dass könnte uns vielleicht die Freiwilligenagentur abnehmen.

Völlig in Luft aufgelöst hat sich die Marktamter-Gruppe, das war eine sehr kontroverse Gruppe. Da gab es die Idee, in der Markthalle ein großes Einkaufszentrum zu gestalten. Die anderen wollten es eher naturbelassen lassen, da gibt es eben auch so einen kleinen Rasen. Also da gab es irre viele Ideen. Es war dann aber so, dass das finanziell nicht so lief, wie das eben so ist. Ich finde das ja auch ganz gut, mittlerweile sind wir froh das wir diese Fläche für verschiedene Dinge zur Verfügung haben. Zeitweise war das dann ein Testzentrum, teilweise wurden da auch Impfungen, Drive-in-Impfungen durchgeführt. Also diese Ideen haben sich völlig aufgelöst. Im Rahmen der Fair-Trade Stadt halten wir zum Beispiel auch unseren Bio-Fair-Trade-Markt ab, der dann auch dort stattgefunden hat. Also so was wird dann da gemacht, oder irgendwelche Versammlungen oder ähnliches, Märkte. Im Winter schwierig, weil man sie nicht beheizen kann, hat aber eine sehr umfangreiche Küche, die man auch sehr gut verwenden kann. Im Moment ist auch die Überlegung, ob die überhaupt noch erhalten bleiben kann, auch wegen Brandschutz und ähnlichem .. aber man ist jetzt über den Platz froh.

Dann die Gruppe Einzelhandel, und wer auch sehr intensiv gearbeitet hat, das war die Gruppe Leitbild, also die Gruppe, die uns ein Leitbild gegeben hat. Das war wirklich sehr interessant, da haben wir uns wirklich sehr viele Gedanken gemacht. Dieses Leitbild, das habe ich vor kurzem Mal wieder wirklich in die Hand genommen und angeschaut, was da wirklich drinnen steht ... und es ist alles richtig! Da hab' ich mir wirklich gedacht, da könnten wir grad noch Mal von vorne beginnen, da steht sehr viel drinnen, aber wir haben wenig davon gemacht! Ist sehr schade. Ich habe das jetzt Mal angeregt, dass wir uns mit dem Leitbild Mal wieder beschäftigen. Da steht wirklich zu allem was drinnen!

Aber was wir davon jetzt speziell an andere Alpenstädte weitergeben konnten ...

Ein Aspekt, der besonders hervorgehoben wurde im damalige Juryentscheid war die Bürgerbeteiligung, was wurde da gemacht?

I: Genau ja. Also Bürgerbeteiligung läuft bei uns immer noch, auch im Zuge von Zukunft Sonthofen. Da hat man immer geschaut, dass in den einzelnen Gruppen natürlich Fachleute, aber schon auch immer Leute aus der Bevölkerung mit dabei sind. Das geht bei uns auch insofern noch weiter, als wir versuchen bei großen Projekten die Leute in Sonthofen zu beteiligen. Ein großes Projekt war etwa die Konversion von Flächen im Rahmen von „Tour des Villes“, wo wir eben sehr schöne Pläne für Flächen entwickelt haben, die Pläne sind immer noch aktuell. Die Pläne sind da, die Umsetzung könnte eigentlich starten! Das haben wir dann auch in dem Projekt eingebracht, also diese Pläne, die wir da gemacht haben. Dann gibt es noch ein Projekt bezüglich Bürgerbeteiligung der ganz anderen Art, und zwar soll hier ganz in der Nähe auf einem ehemaligen Gewerbegebiet ein Paketzentrum ..

M: ... Verteilerzentrum ...

I: ... genau ... errichtet werden, weil die ehemalige Post ihren Standort am Bahnhof aufgibt aber gerne weiter Pakete verteilen möchte. Und die Anwohner dieses Gebietes, bzw. die auf der Zufahrtsfläche sind, finden das natürlich nicht so toll. Und das ist eine Geschichte, wo wir Bürgerbeteiligung schon großschreiben, wo wir versuchen, das dann gegenüber der Bevölkerung auch rüberzubringen. Wie viele Leute da dann wirklich kommen, weiß ich nicht, aber ich denke sehr wichtig ist da einfach die Information. Das gilt auch für andere Projekte. Da gab es zum Beispiel Mal eine Situation, da mussten wir die Steuern erhöhen, weil wir einfach mehr Geld brauchten. Und da habe ich zum Bürgermeister gesagt, wenn wir das machen wollen, dann müssen wir das den Leuten auch erklären, warum wir das brauchen und was wir sonst alles nicht machen können. So sind wir dann auch reingegangen in diese Veranstaltung, das war eine Veranstaltung, wo das das Haus Oberallgäu dann auch wirklich voll war. Man hat das also vorgestellt, mit einer wirklich guten Präsentation, und wir haben gedacht, so jetzt gehts los – aber es ist nichts passiert. Also die Leute haben sich schon gemeldet, eher wenige, die haben sich dann bedankt, für den guten Vortrag, das es überaus verständlich war, und das sie durchaus bereit sind, mehr zu zahlen wenn das so ist. Es ist einfach sehr wichtig, dass man die Leute mitnimmt, dass man Ihnen die Dinge erklärt. Natürlich gibt es immer Leute, die meckern, aber der Grundtenor war gut! Und das verstehe ich schon auch unter Bürgerbeteiligung. Das ist politische Bürgerbeteiligung in einer Kommune!

M: Zukunft Sonthofen war damals am Entstehen, ich habe hier eine Liste dabei, ausgedruckt, an Projekten die man damals gemacht hat.

I: Also es haben sich inzwischen auch andere Gruppen gebildet, es gibt zum Beispiel die Gruppe „Netzwerk Fahrrad“, die treffen sich einmal pro Monat, die auch sehr produktiv sind. Das sind Leute, die die Problematiken kennen und wirklich emsig sind. Dann bildete sich etwa auch eine Energiegruppe. Also Bürgerbeteiligung ist schon etwas, was großgeschrieben wird. Also mir kann es nicht groß genug geschrieben werden. Also lieber etwas länger auf ein Projekt warten, als dann im Nachhinein Ärger zu haben. Das ist etwas, was ich auch in den Alpenstädten sehr stark vertrete, dass wir in den Städten auch die Bevölkerung mit kleineren Projekte noch mehr mitnimmt.

Wenn man jetzt Sonthofen sozusagen als Expertenstadt in Sachen Bürgerbeteiligung sieht, glaubt ihr, dass das die anderen Alpenstädte auch wissen und vielleicht auch auf eure Expertise zurückkommen?

I: Also passiert ist es mir zumindest noch nicht ...

M: ... mir auch nicht! Ich glaube nicht, dass da bekannt ist, dass wir da besondere Experten seien.

I: Ich habe das schon immer mal gesagt. Was man dazu aber auch sagen muss, ist das die letzten 2,3 Jahre im Verein manchmal vielleicht auch die Vorstellungen zwischen Mitgliedern, zwischen Geschäftsstelle und auch Vorstand zum Teil etwas auseinander gegangen sind. Ich bin, wie bereits gesagt, eher jemand, die für kleine Projekte ist, die dann auch bei der Bevölkerung ankommen. Weil wenn ich ganz große Projekte mach, die hier niemand sieht, dann ist es genau so viele Arbeit, aber dann kann ich nicht sagen, ja fahr mal dahin, dann kannst du sehen was wir gemacht haben. Das war schon immer mein Wunsch, dass wir uns da eher ins kleinere Entwickeln. Und ich glaube das ist jetzt, zum Beispiel bei dem Projekt Climate Action auch so. Man macht was mit den anderen zusammen, aber etwas was man auch sehen soll. Und dass ist sicher etwas, wo ich denke, wir wahrscheinlich einfach noch mehr verfolgen sollten. Da meine ich schon, dass man auch Erfahrungen einbringen kann. Ich glaube schon, oder ich weiß, das da Tolmezzo oder Tolmin schon auch sehr viel Bürgerbeteiligung machen.

Ihr habt ja vorher auch schon das Jugendparlament in Brig erwähnt, dass ja mithilfe eurer Expertise umgesetzt wurde ...

I: Genau ja. Ein anderes Thema ist sicher auch der Hochwasserschutz. Das ist jetzt natürlich keine Sache, die Sonthofen alleinig macht, aber bei uns ist es durch die zwei Flüsse natürlich schon sehr aktuell und wir haben da auch einen sehr emsigen Bürgermeister. Da waren von Brixen Mitarbeiter aus der Verwaltung da und dann haben wir mit denen Besichtigungen gemacht, wir haben da auch unsere Sonthofener Erfahrung eingebracht. Also so kann man auch solche eigenen Erfahrungen weitergeben. Brixen ist, war, ja Alpenstadt, und da ist es dann sicher einfacher, mit einer Stadt zu sprechen, die man vielleicht schon kennt, als einfach herumschreiben.

C2) Dann gehen wir vielleicht auch zur nächsten Frage weiter. Könnte man sagen das die Auszeichnung zu Alpenstadt des Jahres 2005 auch ein Auslöser war, nachhaltige Entwicklung und Projekte noch weiter zu verstärken?

M: Ja das ist sicher so, das ist in Berichten auch drinnen. Da hat man damals alles beschlossen, um nachhaltige Entwicklung zu verstärken Man hat zum Beispiel im Zuge dessen beschlossen, das alles was der Stadtrat beschließt immer auch mit der Alpenkonvention abgeglichen werden muss.

I: also das heißt, es gibt so Abfragen bei uns in den Gemeinderatsitzungen, in den Sitzungsvorlagen, wo also abgefragt werden muss, die rechtliche Beurteilung, der finanzielle Aspekt, und dann muss abgefragt werden ob es Zukunft Sonthofen entspricht und dann eben auch der Alpenkonvention ... und jetzt haben eben auch noch dabei, ob es auch der Fahrradstadt entspricht. Und so muss eben jede Sitzung auch mit der Vorlage abgeglichen werden.

M: Also das ist sicherlich ein ganz massiver Fortschritt, dass man sagt, man gibt der Nachhaltigkeit diesen speziellen Stellenwert, das man sagt man wird da klimafit.

I: also wir haben jetzt zum Beispiel einen neuen Standard, was den Energiestatus betrifft, festgelegt, das betrifft aber natürlich nur die städtischen Gebäude. Wir haben festgelegt, dass auf jedes städtische Gebäude eine Solaranlage gebaut werden muss. Wir haben, das ist einer der jüngeren Beschlüsse, festgelegt dass die Innenstadt verdichtet werden muss. Das sind Dinge, die mit Alpenstadt zu tun haben. Im Zusammenhang mit verschiedenen Änderungen, wie jetzt zum Beispiel im Flächenwidmungsplan, im Landesentwicklungsplan, da werden wir ja als Kommune auch immer abgefragt, auch da haben immer geschaut, dass das dann eben auch mit der Alpenkonvention in Einklang zu bringen ist. Da geht es natürlich immer um Mehrheiten ... z.B. Wenn es da um das Riedberger Horn geht. Ich weiß nicht ob du das mitverfolgt hast, da ging es eben um einen Berg hier in der Gegend, wo ein Verbindungslift zwischen zwei Gemeinden gebaut werden soll und dafür sollte das Gebiet einfach Mal von der Alpenschutzzone C in Schutzzone B verschoben werden – da waren wir natürlich dagegen. Das wollten die Politiker unbedingt haben, und haben die Alpenschutzzone C kurzerhand in Alpenschutzzone B umgewandelt, damit dann dort bauen kann. Es schließlich und endlich gescheitert, aber nicht aus Überzeugung, sondern am Geld. Das ist eben dann schon auch abgefragt worden, und da ist es dann schon so, dass ich mich dann auch äußere und sage, der Alpenkonvention entspricht das nicht – geht dann aber natürlich um Mehrheiten. Das sind schon Dinge, aber alles was mit Politik zu tun hat, braucht eben Mehrheiten. Man kann dann schon immer sagen, schau hier wir sind Alpenstadt, aber manchmal ist das eben schwer durchzubringen.

Aber dass ihr dann die Ziele der Alpenkonvention in der Sitzungsvorlage, oder eben auch im Gemeinderatsablauf festgeschrieben habt, das ist ein Aspekt, den Sonthofen freiwillig vorgenommen hat und nicht in allen Alpenstädten generell so gehandhabt wird?

M: Nein, nein.

I: Es war eben damals unser Bürgermeister, der Herr Buhl, dem das auch sehr wichtig war, der da sehr engagiert war. Ich denke er war da so der treibende Faktor. Er hat da natürlich auch Unterstützung gehabt, auch in der Verwaltung, denn ohne die Verwaltung kannst du sowas natürlich sowieso nicht stützen.

Der Verein ist ja den Zielen der Alpenkonvention verpflichtet, inwieweit die Mitglieder das dann aber in ihrer, sozusagen, Tagesordnung unterbringen bleibt jedem für sich überlassen?

M: Genau so ist es, da gibt es kein Prozedere.

C3) Damit zur nächsten Frage. Gibt es spezifische Problemstellungen in der Stadt Sonthofen, wo ihr sagt, da könnte Alpenstadt des Jahres unterstützen?

[kurze Pause]

I: Ja doch, also Problemstellungen vielleicht weniger, aber es wird ja hier in Sonthofen eine Ausstellung stattfinden, wo wir ja Alpenstadt auch vorstellen werden. Da ist jetzt keine Problemstellung, sondern was Positives, aber da ist es schon so, dass wir auch sehr stark auf die Geschäftsstelle zurückgreifen, also einerseits was das Grafische anbelangt, also auf Karolin, aber auch Magdalena, unsere Geschäftsführerin. Da sind wir schon sehr stark auf Dinge, die in der Geschäftsstelle vorhanden sind angewiesen. Und auch auf den Input was die Gestaltung anbelangt und auch die Ideen. Manfred macht ja immer ganz tolle Zusammenstellungen an Texten, die man da verwenden kann, aber es wird dann nochmals mit der Geschäftsstelle darüber gesprochen, abgeklärt. Also solche Hilfestellungen sind durchaus sinnig. Oder wenn es mal darum geht, das man in einer anderen Sprache jemanden schreibt, klar könnte man auch eine Übersetzung machen lassen, aber das ist natürlich schon sehr schön, wenn man bestimmte Dinge abgeben kann. Was auch sehr schön ist, ist das die Geschäftsstelle verknüpft ist mit CIPRA und da eben auch ganz viele Fäden hat zu verschiedenen Stellen hat und man da auch ganz schnell zu Ergebnissen kommen kann.

M: Aber das man hier jetzt wirkliche Beiträge zur Regionalentwicklung leisten kann, das glaube ich eher weniger.

Und auf der Ebene von Expertise, Know-How?

I: Know-How auf jeden Fall. Wenn es da um Know-How geht, dass vielleicht bei uns schon auch vorhanden ist, wo du dich aber unglaublich reinhängen müsstest, um das rauszukriegen, da kann man sich dann natürlich schon hinwenden und nachfragen. Da durchaus.

Aber kein aktuell kein konkretes Thema?

I: Also es ist so, dass wir schon auch sehr viel Fachkunde im Haus, in den verschiedenen Abteilungen, haben. Man kann zurückgreifen, es ist auch oft so, dass es dann in der Geschäftsstelle heißt, ja frag dann Mal da nach, die haben das schon gemacht, dass man da weiterverbunden wird. Und das muss dann natürlich auch nicht immer eine Alpenstadt sein, die haben ja auch ganz viel andere Verbindungen.

I: Ich wüsste jetzt konkret aber gerade nichts. Es ist oft umgekehrt so das dann irgendwelche Anliegen vom Manfred gelöst werden.

M: Und dass da jetzt irgendwelche Gutachten gemacht werden, eher nicht. Die Regionalentwicklung ist da eben sehr spezifisch.

C4) Dann kommen wir noch zu Projekten. Ich habe gesehen, dass Sonthofen ja an sehr vielen Projekten teilgenommen hat und teilnimmt. Aber es gibt natürlich viele anderen Städte, die wenig oder kaum an Projekten teilnehmen. Seht ihr da Möglichkeiten oder Anreize, wie man die Mitglieder da noch stärker einbinden könnte bzw. welche Art von Projekten es vielleicht stärker forciert werden könnten?

I: Also dass mit dem Einbinden das hängt eben, wie gesagt, immer stark damit zusammen, dass du in der Kommune 1,2,3 Personen und erstens einmal den Bürgermeister brauchst. Und wenn der jetzt sagt, okay ich habe den Titel, das ist schön, aber kein Interesse hat sich da weiter einzubringen, dann wird das schwierig. Wenn der Bürgermeister aber sagt, ja das interessiert mich, ich guck mal ob ich der Verwaltung jemanden finde, den das auch interessiert, der dann zumindest zu den Versammlungen kommt und auch sieht, okay das könnte Spaß machen, dann hast du gewonnen. Wenn du dann mehrere Leute hast, auch auf politischer Ebene hast, die diesen Gedanken auch mittragen wollen, ich denke dann ist das ganz gut dabei. Da ist es halt manchmal so, wenn der Bürgermeister wegfällt, durch Wahl oder so, wie es in Bad Reichenhall so war, in Herisau in Bad Aussee, dann ist es ganz, ganz schwierig. Da ist es dann schon so, dass wir auch versuchen, uns dann gegenseitig zu helfen. In Bad Reichenhall war es dann so, dass wir versuchen, dass der Herr Denner eben auch gefragt hat, ob nicht jemand von uns kommen könnte und dann auch erzählen könnte was das ist und was so gemacht wird. So was machen wir dann natürlich sehr, sehr gerne. Aber das erste ist, den Bürgermeister zu haben.

Ja und um das aktiv zu machen, gibt es natürlich schon Städte, wo wir wissen, dass da jetzt im Moment nicht so viel Aktivität da ist. Da gibt es natürlich die Möglichkeiten, dass man da persönlich auch mal vorbeikommt, was auch Magdalena auch sehr oft macht, dass sie da hinfährt und ein persönliches Gespräch sucht. So ergeben sich dann oft auch mal neue Städte. Was wir auch vorhaben, und wir haben das auch schon mal gemacht, wir haben ja sehr engen Kontakt zu Innsbruck, die ja auch schon mal Alpenstadt werden wollten. Wir sind da mal dort gewesen, bei dem Bürgermeister, das war auch sehr nett, der ist ja auch von der Grünen Partei, wir haben den dann auch eingeladen, aber das hat bis jetzt ab noch nicht so gepasst. Aber das möchten wir jetzt schon nochmal weiter forcieren. Wir haben schon viele Vorstellungen, was wir uns vorstellen könnten als Alpenstadt, und das möchten wir jetzt auch einfach nochmal aktivieren! Es steht und fällt mit den Bürgermeistern. Das ist natürlich immer der Knackpunkt. Aber mich freut sehr, dass die neuen Alpenstädten, die wir jetzt haben, wirklich sehr aktiv sind!

M: Da gab es in Bad Reichenhall auch mal ein Treffen, da haben wir sehr gelacht. Da haben wir den Bürgermeister besucht, weil der eben auch sehr lax war, und haben da auch ein paar Projektbeschreibungen mit dabei gehabt ... und der hat dann gesagt, danke, legt es Mal da hinten hin. Ist aber schon länger her.

Weißt du, manche werden auch einfach müde, Valentin, die erwarten sich da ganz viel Tourismus, aber die Steigerung kommt halt nicht so. Und dann gibt es auch Leute, die sich dann fragen, ja bringt das überhaupt etwas? Da ist dann anfangs auch eine große Euphorie da, wir sind Alpenstadt, aber der erwartete Aufschwung im Tourismus bleibt aber aus. Da gibt es ja den Mitgliedsbeitrag, 5000 Euro, und im Festjahr 7000 Euro, und dazu kommen natürlich auch noch die Kosten für die Organisation der Festivitäten und so weiter. Da gibt es schon auch Beispiele, wo Mitgliedschaften ruhend gestellt werden oder wo einfach nicht mehr gezahlt wird, wo wir dann anfragen, mahnen. Da muss man aber sehr vorsichtig sein, dass die nicht sagen, ja dann treten wir halt aus. Da versucht man dann schon, das 2,3 Jahre mitlaufen zu lassen, zu hoffen vielleicht kommt da ein anderer Bürgermeister, ein neuer Ruck.

Und wenn man jetzt speziell zu Projekten kommt, würdet ihr sagen, dass es da eine Art von Projekten gibt, wo man sich vielleicht auch vonseiten Sonthofens wünschen würde, dass die noch mehr forciert werden?

M: Das beste sind halt immer Projekte, wo man in dem Ort was sieht. Wenn man da EU-Projekte macht, wo man vielleicht 180.000 Euro Zuschuss bekommt, ist am Ende vielleicht nicht klar, wo das Geld genau hingeflossen ist – da geht dann ganz viel in die Verwaltung, in die Büros. Daher ist es schon besser, wie auch Ingrid schon gesagt hat, man macht kleinere Sachen, die man vor Ort auch spürt.

I: Es ist schon sichtbar, wenn man einfach mal nur sagt, okay im Alpenstadt-Jahr pflanzt man einen Baum. Vollkommen einfach und normal, aber das ist etwas, dass man sieht. Wir haben zum Beispiel einen gepflanzt, mit dem Markus Reiterer zusammen. Ich freu mich jedes Mal wenn ich da vorbeigehe, Markus ist jetzt nicht mehr Generalsekretär, aber irgendwie ist das ganz nett. Oder wir haben einmal einen Alpenstadtgeburtstag gefeiert, also solche Dinge, die dann bürgernah sind und die Leute auch mitkriegen.

M: Oder wenn dann jemand zu Besuch kommt, das ist sowieso das einfachste.

I: Stimmt, wir müssen auch noch ein Foto für unseren Sonthofener machen mit dir. Da können wir einen kleinen Artikel machen. Das machen wir öfters, schicken das dann auch an die Geschäftsstelle, dass die dann auch sehen, was da gemacht wird.

D) Ausblick

D1) Sehr schön. Wir kommen dann auch schon Richtung Ende. Bei der nächsten Frage geht es darum, wir haben eh schon kurz darüber gesprochen, welche Städte, konkret, oder auch welche Art von Städte würdet ihr empfehlen, dem Verein beizutreten bzw. sich zu bewerben?

I: Also unsere Liste – okay also Innsbruck werden wir nochmal anfragen, weil das wäre ein ganz toller Partner. Dann Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Lindenberg, dann hätten wir gerne auch Lindau, das wäre so eine Traumstadt – ich kenn da jetzt jemanden, mal sehen, ob ich da vielleicht einen Kontakt kriege. Wenn man jemanden kennt, ist das natürlich immer am besten. Rosenheim wollten wir nochmal anschreiben – die haben glaub ich jetzt auch eine neue Bürgermeisterin.

Und ihr schaut da aber, ob die Städte innerhalb des Alpenbogens liegen?

I: Müssen wir! Also einen Ort hätten wir schon noch, Wasserburg am Bodensee, aber das ist dann eben nicht mehr innerhalb des Alpenbogens. Also das müssten wir abklären. Unser ehemaliger zweiter Bürgermeister ist jetzt nämlich dort Bürgermeister, und der hat da schon auch sein Interesse erklärt. Füssen war auch mal interessiert, die haben jetzt auch einen neuen Bürgermeister.

Also bei Wasserburg war das auch das Problem, dass, die eben keine Stadt sind, aber das ist jetzt ja ohnehin nicht mehr so eng. Also wir haben uns da ja auch rechtlich abgesichert, was das dann genau bedeutet wenn man Stadt sagt.

Da gibt es jetzt also gar keine Obergrenze mehr?

I: Nein. Als die allererste Satzung herauskam, hat da keiner daran gedacht, dass das bei Städten in Deutschland ein Problem sein könnte. Bruneck hatte ich dann auch noch im Blick, finde ich ist auch so eine schöne Stadt. Da mir gedacht, Mensch das wäre doch Mal 'ne Stadt!

Also welche Art von Städten sucht ihr da?

I: Städte, die zumindest auch was die Umgebung angeht, aus einer ähnlichen Umgebung kommen wie wir, die auch mit Tourismus zutun haben, auch Problematik im Tourismus haben. Was Lindau, angeht, zum Beispiel, die haben ja auch sehr viel Radtourismus. Und dass das auch einfach in die gleiche Richtung geht, wie bei uns. Bei Innsbruck ist das natürlich ganz anders, das ist für mich eine Stadt, die schön ist, die rein kulturell auch einiges zu bieten hat, und die natürlich auch ein Leuchtturm wäre, wenn wir so was wie Innsbruck noch bei uns hätten – ähnlich wie bei Bozen – die sind aber jetzt auch eher weniger aktiv, die waren früher sehr aktiv, im Moment aber eher weniger. Wenn du so eine Stadt hast, oder auch Trento, ist das schon eine gewisse Aussage! Was jetzt wieder sehr aktiv ist, ist ja zum Beispiel Chamonix! Ich denke solche Lauchtürme sind schon wichtig. Die Idee war ja, noch vom Markus Reiterer, als Österreich den Vorsitz in Alpenkonvention hatte, Innsbruck als Alpenstadt zu gewinnen. Österreich hat ja dann den Vorsitz weitergegeben, jetzt im Moment hat dann Slowenien nächstes Jahr den Vorsitz, und da ist Urož dran, bei einer slowenischen Stadt nachzufragen, ob es da Möglichkeiten gibt.

M: Ist schon interessant das es nur zwei deutsche Städte gibt, nicht?

I: Ja die Italiener sind da einfach ein bisschen offener denke ich. Obwohl der Mitgliedsbeitrag ja auch nicht gerade gering ist, da möchte man meinen, dass das für deutsche Städte vielleicht auch leichter zu stemmen ist als für die kleinen italienischen Städte.

D2) Ihr habt ja vorhin auch erwähnt, dass eine der Stärken von AdJ die Vertrautheit ist. Gibt es von dem her auch irgendwo die Überlegung, dass man das Netzwerk klein hält?

I: Es gab diese Diskussion schon Mal, ob man eine Obergrenze setzt, das haben wir dann aber nicht gemacht, weil wir denken, dass sich das immer irgendwo selbst regulieren wird. Du wirst nicht immer jedes Jahr noch jemanden und noch jemanden finden. Es ist einfach wichtig, dass das Netzwerk lebendig ist. Und ein Netzwerk ist meiner Meinung nach lebendiger, wenn es nicht zu groß ist, wenn man sich kennt, auch persönlich Kontakte hat, dass man auch die Geschäftsstelle kennt. Und man in solchen kleineren Einheiten auch einfach besser agieren kann.

M: Die Überlegung war dann einfach auch, wie man die Städte, die schon Mitglieder sind, noch besser einbinden kann, anstatt dass man immer neue Mitglieder ins Boot holt.

Damit habt ihr mir eh schon gewissermaßen eine Antwort auf die letzte Frage gegeben, wo ihr die Zukunft des Netzwerkes seht. Möchtet ihr da noch was hinzufügen?

I: Ich denke, das ist genau das, dass wir einfach weiter eine gute, enge Zusammenarbeit in einem nicht zu riesigen Kreis haben möchten und durch diese Persönlichkeit auch einfach besser reden und austauschen können. Mein Ziel ist nicht, da hundert Städte zu haben, dann kenne ich die Einzelnen Städte nicht mehr. Es steht und fällt mit den Leuten, wie aber überall.

Interview 3: Idrija

After request of the interviewee, the questions were not answered personally or via Videocall, but written.

Karmen **MAKUĆ** works for the city of Idrija and is, among others, responsible for AtY.

Introduction

Can you both tell me a little bit about you and your position in the town of Idrija and regarding Alpine Town of the Year?

I am a consultant for economic activity at the Municipality of Idrija.

I deal with agriculture, economy, housing policy, tourism, renting business premises and participating in various projects (within the local action group and cross-border projects).

Over the years, I have participated in some Alpine Town of the Year projects, such as: Tour des villes, Ysam- Youth Shaping Alpine Municipalities, 100max, etc. and in the Covenant of Mayors.

A) Short questions

1) What was the reason, Idrija joined the network "Alpine Town of the Year"?

Idrija is committed to environmental responsibility, to achieving the objectives of the Alpine Convention and raising awareness of the Alps. Joining the Alpine Town of the Year Association is a confirmation that we are on the right path and a special honour.

2) Which are the Towns within the network, that Idrija cooperates with the closest?

Tolmin, Tolmezzo, Sonthofen, Chambery and a few years ago in one project with Annecy and Bolzano.

3) Is Idrija part of any other (transnational) networks in the alpine Region?

No.

4) Do you see Idrija as part of a greater Alpine (Makro-)Region?

Yes.

B) Alpine Town of the Year

1) What is Idrija's input to the ATotY network?

Idrija invested its knowledge and experience through cooperation with other towns in joint projects.

2) What is Idrija's output from the network? What do you use the network for?

We gained a lot of experience from partners in joint projects. We use the network to exchange opinions and gain insight into solving the same problems in other towns and to gain partners to implement various projects.

3) What are the main Challenges / Barriers of networking?

The main challenge of networking is to succeed in showing the population that the only correct way is to live in a sustainable way. It is necessary to involve young people in projects, because only this way, something can be changed in the future.

The main barrier of networking is that the towns are very far apart and that we are from different countries with different legislation.

4) What is the specific added value of "ATotY", also in comparison to other networks that exist?

We cannot compare, as we are not a member of any other network.

5) How has the pandemic affected the work of the association?

It was hard because we couldn't meet for a long time, get together and exchange opinions in person. Fortunately, today's technology allows smooth cooperation via zoom connections.

C) Idrija

1) Having been a large producer of mercury in the past, Idrija has managed to shift its economy completely. What are today specific challenges the Town of Idrija faces, in terms of sustainable local and regional development?

The biggest challenge is demographic - how to keep young educated people in this environment, how to provide high value-added jobs and provide enough housing for young people.

2) How does Idrija promote sustainable development of its Town and its Region?

We extensively work on the promotion of tourism that coexists with nature and promote sustainable development through various projects within the Local Action Group (education, promotion etc.)

3) Idrija is one of the most active members of the ATotY association, having taken part in a whole number of ATotY-Projects, including of course Alps 2030. How could other members as well be encouraged to be included in more projects?

They need to be introduced to the benefits of participating in projects. NGOs and young people need to be involved.

D) Outlook

1) Who would you recommend to join the association ATotY?

Joining the association would be recommended to municipalities that behave sustainably.

2) Where do you see the future of ATotY?

We see the future of the network in the inclusion of other towns that behave sustainably and want to improve the quality of life for their citizens.

Interview 4: Villach (LeeB)

Do, 21.04; 14:30-15:00h, via Telefon.

Gerhard **LEE**B ist Jurymitglied und Mitbegründer des Vereins Adj. In der Folge wurden Fragen einerseits zur Gründungsgeschichte, andererseits zur jetzigen Situation im Verein und in Villach gestellt.

Zu Villach wurden zwei Interviews geführt, einmal mit Christina Redlein, der Konsulentin, und einmal mit Gerhard Leeb, einem langjährigen Wegbegleiter mit mit-Initiatoren des Netzwerkes. In dem Interview mit Gerhard Leeb steht die Gründungsgeschichte im Vordergrund, während mit Christina Redlein die aktuelle Situation und die Situation Villachs stärker zur Aussprache kommt. Die beiden Interviews folgen daher nicht zu hundert Prozent dem grundsätzlichen Schema.

A) Kurzfragen

A1) Okay, und dann würde ich auch gleich mit der Gründung anfangen. Was würdest du sagen, 1997, was waren die Gründe, warum man das Gefühl gehabt hat, man möchte diesen Verein gründen bzw. es notwendig ist dieses Netzwerk zu gründen?

Im Grunde genommen war der Ideenlieferant die Kulturhauptstadt Europas. Mir hat das wahnsinnig gut gefallen, dieses wandern. Ich habe damals, 1995, genauer gesagt, das erste Mal an der Aktion Feuer in den Alpen teilgenommen, am Dobratsch, dem Villacher Hausberg. Nachdem ich dann noch sehr lange alleine oben sitzen musste, um zu warten, bis die Feuerstelle erloschen ist, war das ein sehr eindrucksvoller Abend und Nacht und ich habe damals einige Ideen, sowohl zu meinem Magazin Planet Alpen als auch plötzlich die Idee zu sagen, was wäre, so wie die Kulturhauptstadt Europas, ein Projekt, wo aber Nachhaltigkeit im Mittelpunkt steht. Damals war der Arbeitstitel ursprünglich Alpenhauptstadt, aber da haben wir die Diskussion gehabt, das ist dann wieder dieses Großkotzige. Ich habe dann den Bürgermeister ein paar Wochen später einen Brief geschrieben und um einen Termin gebeten. Ich bin dann mit einem kurzen Konzept, über drei Seiten, bei ihm vorstellig geworden. Er hat eigentlich damals so irgendwie desinteressiert gewirkt. Man muss ja auch sagen, da war aber damals schon eine Vizebürgermeisterin, die später lange Jahre in Villach Finanzchefin war.

Eine sehr interessiert und verständnisvolle Frau, für die eben auch Ökologie immer eine Thema war. Sie wollte eigentlich dann mein Konzept in alle Alpensprachen übersetzen lassen und an circa 100 Städte ausschicken. Aufgrund des Desinteresses des Bürgermeisters, unter Anführungszeichen, kriegen wir am nächsten Tag schon ein Anruf von seiner Mitarbeiterin, dass ihm das sehr gut gefällt und ob man noch einen Termin ausmachen könnten. Und Villach war natürlich naheliegend, es ist meine Heimatstadt, ich kenne hier alle. Ja, dann ist es schon losgegangen, wobei eine Prämisse des Bürgermeisters und der Vizebürgermeisterin war, alpenübergreifend arbeitende Organisationen als Patronanz sozusagen zu finden.

Das ist mir dann mit dem Professor Dr. Hans Haid sehr schnell gelungen, mit der ProVitaAlpina, damit hatten wir schon den Kultursektor abgedeckt und die ARGE Alpenstädte und die CIPRA unter Andreas Weissen haben sich dann den Ball hin und hergeschoben. Die einen haben gesagt, wenn die anderen mitmachen, machen wir auch mit, so ist es eine Weile hin- und hergegangen. Dann habe ich aber bei der CIPRA Jahresversammlung in Innsbruck, 96, habe ich dann einen Anruf bekommen von Andreas Weissen, den damaligen Präsidenten, wenn der Bürgermeister von Villach bereit ist, eine Garantieerklärung abzugeben, dass die Stadt Villach den Verein auf fünf Jahre finanziert, dann kann er das in die Sitzung bringen und dann sollte es funktionieren. Ich habe dann um Acht in der Früh an dem betreffenden Tag die Bestätigung von Bürgermeister gefaxt und bin dann mit dem Original direkt nach Innsbruck losgefahren, so um 11, da ist in der Sitzung schon beschlossen gewesen, die CIPRA mach mit, und dann hat auch die ARGE Alpenstädte mitgemacht. Damit hatten wir also drei alpenübergreifende Organisationen, eine davon existiert ja nicht mehr, die ARGE Alpenstädte, nach dem Tod von Ettore Bonazza, die das mitgetragen haben. Villach musste sich dann aber nicht bewerben, es wurde einfach entschieden, Villach ist die allererste Alpenstadt des Jahres.

Und was waren damals die Erwartungen an den an den Verein?

Die Erwartungen waren, dass der Verein dann wirklich Arbeitsgruppen aufstellt zu den einzelnen Konventionsprotokollen. Das haben wir dann auch relativ schnell und gut geschaffen und eben auch ein Rahmenprogramm sozusagen für das erste Jahr aufgestellt. Da haben wir gute Leute gehabt! Allein die Ergebnisse bis heute in, von Villach als Alpenstadt des Jahres, zeigen das wir schon sehr wichtig und wertvoll in der Region sind.

Wie würdest du es vergleichen, wenn du jetzt schaut okay, was hat es damals für Erwartungen gegeben, zu Gründungszeiten des Vereins, damit, wie der Verein jetzt aussieht?

Also nachdem ich ein ungeduldiger Mensch bin, ist es mir natürlich immer alles zu wenig. Aber, Villach hat zum Glück die Latte sehr hoch gelegt. Wir haben ja damals auch nicht die Erwartungshaltung gehabt, dass jedes Jahr eine neue Alpenstadt kommt, ursprünglich war ein 2-jähriger Rhythmus angedacht, den wir aber dann der Bewerbung von Belluno als zweite anstatt des Jahres über den Haufen haben werfen können. Es gab urplötzlich so ein großes Interesse, vielleicht auch durch die mediale Begleitung. Ich habe bis heute eigentlich nicht zu Ende recherchieren können, wie Belluno überhaupt darüber informiert wurde.

Ab 99 war ja dann jedes Jahr eine Alpenstadt des Jahres ist und die Kriterien, dieser Kriterienkatalog, der ist doch sehr umfangreich. Also wenn man den einmal ausfüllt und dann will man's schon haben! Man kann immer darauf hinweisen, wir haben ein Ergebnis der Alpenstadt des Jahres in Villach war der Biobauernmarkt, der seit damals jede Woche funktioniert, in den städtischen Kindergärten und Altersheimen Biokost, wir haben ein Naturpark geschaffen, der auch mein Kind dann war, wo alpenweit das erste Mal Lifte abgebaut wurde, also wirklich ganz konsequent. Es gibt einen Generationenvertrag mit allen nachfolgenden Generationen in

Villach zum Thema Wasser, das also in Villach nie verkauft werden darf. Also wenn sich alle Städte im Schnitt ein bisschen an Villach orientieren, dann bin ich schon zufrieden.

Dann würdest du also sagen, es war eher überraschend, wie schnell sich der Verein entwickelt hat?

Es ist so schnell großgeworden, dass wir dann nach fünf Jahren der CIPRA die Verwaltung übergeben haben. Also es durften sich auch wieder Alpenweit Organisationen bewerben. CIPRA war auch mein Favorit, ich durfte aber an der Abstimmung nicht dabei sein, aber zum Glück ist es die CIPRA geworden, dass sehe ich bis heute!

B) Alpenstadt des Jahres

B1) Gut, dann können wir eh etwas mehr in die Gegenwart kommen. Zum Ablauf im Verein aktuell, was würdest du sagen, wenn man sich anschaut, zum Beispiel wie Projekte umgesetzt werden, wie die Zusammenarbeit funktioniert, was sind Hindernisse oder Herausforderungen?

Nehmen wir Mal die Corona-Zeit heraus, mit den Zoom-Sitzungen. Ich glaube, ein ganz, ganz großer Punkt, wo sich auch viele andere Organisationen eine Scheibe abschneiden können, ist – also was ich nicht planen konnte ist, dass, so wie bei Kulturhauptstadt Europas die Stadt ein Jahr Alpenstadt des Jahres ist, und dann kommt die nächste - aber was sich unglaublich entwickelt hat, und ich auch unglaublich liebe: Wir sind eine Familie geworden. Also erstens die Umgangsformen, ich bin wirklich bei vielen Organisationen dabei, aber die Umgangsformen, die wir haben, die sind wirklich nachahmenswert. Also wir sind wirklich eine große Familie. Wenn nicht gerade ein großer politischer Umsturz war in einer Stadt, sind wirklich Leute seit 20 Jahren dabei. Das ist natürlich eine Basis, auf der man gut arbeiten kann. Dann, [überlegt] für mich ein absolutes Highlight, also ich bin mehr der Aktionist, mir fehlen manchmal die Beispiele, wie wir eines in Morbegno exekutieren konnten, wo bei unserer Sitzung, an einem Freitag, sich die gesamte Jugend des Vall Morbegno zusammengetan hat um zu demonstrieren. Ich habe das mitbekommen und habe während der Sitzung gesagt, wenn wir das wirklich leben, was wir so besprechen, müssten wir eigentlich da runter gehen und uns solidarisch mit den Kinder zeigen, und wir haben das wirklich geschafft. Die Jugendlichen waren wirklich begeistert, zuerst waren sie überrascht, dass da der Bürgermeister mit seinen Schergen daherkommt. Es war auch politisch auf relativ hoher Ebene. Es war auch der damalige Präsident der Alpenkonvention dabei. Wir haben uns dann gemeinsam mit Fridays For Future und den Jugendlichen solidarisch erklärt. Ich habe da ein Erinnerungsfoto, wo der Bürgermeister von Morbegno, gemeinsam mit einer Aktivistin vor einem Transparent steht, auf dem stand, „The Planet is hotter than my Boyfriend“ [lacht]. Solche Aktionen hätte ich gerne mehr, schaue auch immer ob es möglich ist.

Der inhaltliche Teil von Adj liegt immer noch weit hinter dem Getanen. Ich muss auch sagen, ich habe eine Umfrage in Salzburg, Villach und Graz gemacht und habe beide Begriffe nachgefragt, Adj und CIPRA. Also Beide Organisationen haben entscheidende Defizite was die Bekanntheit betrifft.

Also deiner Meinung nach müsste man noch stärker auf öffentlichkeitswirksame Aktionen setzten?

Ja, entweder Aktionen oder auch etwas, was ich aufgebaut habe für mich, eine vertrauensebene zu Journalisten. Die wollen Geschichten, die wollen nicht schreiben da wurde die 25. Alpenstadt eröffnet. Ich war selbst lange in dem Geschäft, ich weiß was da täglich reinkommt. Da geht 90% in den Kübel, weil es einfach nicht interessant ist. Ich glaub da wäre noch viel Nachholbedarf. Ich weiß nicht warum, das gibt es auch bei den Grünen, eine gewisse Zurückhaltung gegenüber den Medien, dabei, wenn eine Vertrauensbasis da ist auf beiden Seiten, nimmt der den fertigen Text, wenn es eine gute Geschichte ist. Mir ist es gelungen, vor einigen Jahren in der Kleinen Zeitung wöchentlich jeweils auf einer Doppelseite eine Alpenstadt des Jahres vorzustellen. Aber eben, weil ich die Leute kenne und ich seit Langem mit ihnen arbeite, und sie wissen, dass die Sachen die ich liefere keine schlechten Sachen sind.

Weil einfach auch in Zukunft für die Konsulenten in den Städten immer wieder schwer zu argumentieren sein wird, der Jahresbeitrag. Überall wird gespart. Auch vom Bürgermeister gegenüber der Bevölkerung. Und der Konsulent muss gegenüber dem Bürgermeister argumentieren und dieser gegenüber der Bevölkerung. Also da sehe ich den größten Nachholbedarf.

B4) Nachdem du gerade erklärt hast, dass man eben diesen Mitgliedsbeitrag argumentieren muss. Wo siehst du denn den speziellen Mehrwert des Vereins, im Vergleich vielleicht auch zu anderen Netzwerken im Alpenraum?

Also wenn ich die niedrigste Eben hernehme, dann hätte es für mich einen sehr großen touristischen Mehrwert. Also eigentlich dürfte kein Tourismusprospekt ohne das Logo rausgehen. Oder eine Kurzbeschreibung: Zu uns zu fahren ist gut, weil wir eine Stadt sind die nachhaltig denkt, mit dem Besuch unterstützen sie auch diese Bewegung. Sie haben einen Mehrwert und einen Genuss.

Die andere Ebene ist die Verbindung zur Bevölkerung, die natürlich auch gehalten werden muss. Dass diese sagt, ich darf in einer Alpenstadt leben! Das bedarf natürlich auch einer Arbeit, diese Motivation zu erzielen.

Man kann das über viele Kanäle machen. Jede Stadt hat seine eigenen Mitteilungsblätter. Dort immer kleine Anker zu machen zum Beispiel, oder es gibt bei uns immer zu den Ortstafeln Zusatzbeschreibungen, zum Beispiel Gesundheitsgemeinde. Dass man immer auch Adj und Jahreszahl dazugibt, sodass ich also auch in meinen Alltag immer ein wenig damit konfrontiert bin. Und das wäre bei geringstem Kostenaufwand möglich. Das kleine Schild kostet, wenn's hochkommt, 20€. Heutzutage sind alle Leute völlig überfordert mit Signalen – wenn ein Signal nicht vorkommt, gibt es das nicht! Da wäre Mal eine ernsthafte Diskussion nötig.

Also auch dass sich die Alpenstädte noch viel stärker als solche vermarkten?

Genau! Ich habe es mal in Chamonix gesagt: toll wir sind also ein absoluter Geheimverein, wir kennen uns, aber sonst niemand kennt uns.

Aber dasselbe Problem hat auch die CIPRA. Ich habe dazu eine Befragung gemacht in verschiedensten Bevölkerungsschichten und der Bekanntheitsgrad liegt unter 1% .. selbst in Villach, wo ich zuhause bin.

C) Villach

C1) Dann hätte ich noch ein paar Fragen zu Villach selbst. Die einzelnen Alpenstädte wurden ja im Prinzip immer aufgrund eines Juryentscheids ausgewählt. Bei Villach ist das aber nicht der Fall, zumindest lässt sich der Entscheid online nicht nachvollziehen. Was war der Grund, warum Villach eine Alpenstadt des Jahres ist?

Naja, grundsätzlich, das steht auch in dem ursprünglich Konzept drinnen, Städte in den Alpen haben die größten Herausforderungen, weil es einen großen Zuzug gibt – also Wohnen, Leben Arbeiten. Das zweite ist eben auch, dass die Städte, im Zuge des Klimawandels, sehr viel mehr Grün brauchen. Ich war damals mit dem Bürgermeister per du das hat es natürlich etwas erleichtert. Villach hat sehr viele Problemzonen gehabt, mit denen Villach zwar schon recht gut umgegangen ist im Alltag, aber in die Zukunft projiziert. Wir hatten eine sehr aktive Gruppe in der Photovoltaik, wir sind sehr gut mit dem Abfall umgegangen. Villach hat auch eine sehr wichtige geopolitische Position, wir sind ja nur 20km von der slowenischen Grenze, damals noch jugoslawisch, entfernt. Wir haben ja auch eine slowenische Minderheit. Also auch dieses Internationale war in Villach bereits vorhanden. Daher war eben auch die Chance da, dass wir in Slowenisch, Italienisch und Deutsch kommunizieren konnten, um eben zu einem alpenübergreifenden Projekt zu werden.

Dann diese Empfindlichkeit des Villacher Trinkwassers, weil eben dieser Berg, von dem das Villacher Trinkwasser kommt, eben auch ein Schigebiet mit Rennen war. Es gibt dort aber eine sehr empfindliche Karstgeologie. Also es waren sehr viele Dinge da, die wir schon recht gut gemacht haben, die auch eine Bedrohung waren. Es hat viel Arbeit gegeben.

Also war die Auszeichnung vor allem auch als Anreiz zu sehen, weiter an Nachhaltigkeitsprojekten zu arbeiten.

Absolut ja!

Ja und was wirklich interessant ist, es scheinen mich die Romanen besser zu verstehen als die Germanen. Weil wenn man sich jetzt anschaut, Österreich hat nur 2 Alpenstädte, Deutschland 2, die Schweiz im deutschsprachigen Raum 2 Alpenstädte des Jahres, sogar die Slowenen haben 3, Frankreich hat 5 und Italien ist irgendwo bei 10 schon. Also Italiener und Franzosen scheinen interessierter zu sein. Biella, Chamonix sind Regionen, die ganz weit weg sind von dem Spektrum, das ich betreue, aber es scheint zu funktionieren – und auch über parteipolitische Grenzen hinweg.

Die Frage ist im Endeffekt natürlich nicht nur ob man Mitglied des Vereins ist, ob man Alpenstadt ist, sondern eben auch ob man aktiv an Projekten teilnimmt.

Ja das ist ein Problem. Das kann man auch bei der CIPRA nachfragen. Da ist ein Nebeneffekt aber auch, im Hinblick auf EU-Förderungen, dass wenn man sich so vertraut ist, und einer an einer EU-Projekt teilnimmt, kann es heute wirklich passieren, dass einer sagt, ich möchte das machen, ruft seine Freunde in den anderen Ländern an und stellt so sehr schnell ein Projekt auf die Beine. So gesehen ist AdJ sehr lebendig!

C2) Wenn man jetzt nochmals zu Villach schaut, nimmt die Stadt aber, zumindest nachdem was öffentlich einsehbar ist, nur an sehr wenigen Projekten von AdJ teil. Was sind da die Gründe dafür?

Ja, dass ist auch ein bisschen deshalb, wir haben sehr lange den gleichen Bürgermeister gehabt und der neue hat mal eine Zeit gebraucht, um sich einzuarbeiten und hat auch andere Probleme als Alpenstadt des Jahres zu betreiben, auch finanziell. Er hatte zunächst mal andere Interessen. Da muss ich auch sagen, da habe auch ich zu wenig getan, ich muss mich da mal mit im zusammensetzen und Lobbying machen

Aber du siehst es so, dass Villach in Zukunft auch wieder aktiver sein wird?

Ja, es ist ja schade, Christina hat sich so gefreut auf die Versammlung in Belluno und im letzten Moment kriegt ihre Tochter Corona. Aber hoffentlich bei der nächsten Versammlung in ...

... Passy ...

Genau. Da werden wir auch gemeinsam hinfahren. Ich habe das oft beobachtet das der Bürgermeister, der ohnehin schon überfordert ist, an jemanden übergeben hat, als Konsulent, der dann über Jahre hinweg so begeistert dabei ist und das auch gar nicht mehr aus der Hand geben will. Das war auch ein sehr positive Effekt, ich habe das auch in Villach beobachtet, das auch die Erwartungshaltung vom Bürgermeister nicht die war, die der Mitarbeiter gebracht hat.

D) Ausblick

D1) Mit meinen Fragen bin ich damit auch so weit durch. Zum Schluss vielleicht noch ein kurzer Ausblick: Wo siehst du die Zukunft des Verein, wohin geht die Reise?

Also meiner Meinung nach wird die Reise vor allem hin zum Thema Klimawandel gehen. Ich sehe da zwei Dinge, für die ich mich auch sehr engagieren werde: das eine ist die Jugend, und wie man der Hoffnung geben kann – sie hat uns vom Neandertaler bis hierher gebracht. Das Zweite ist eben diesen Klimawandel endlich mal auf die Alpen herunterzubrechen. In den Medien geht es viel um so Dinge wie den Meeresspiegel, aber was bedeutet es für den Alpenraum? In der letzten Sitzung ist das auch kurz angesprochen worden: es werden Täler unbewohnbar, es werden Waldbrände passieren, vorheriges Jahr war beispielsweise in Italien der erste Waldbrand 2 Monate früher als gewöhnlich und dieser Waldbrand war in den alpen und nicht in den Abruzzen oder in Süditalien. Und die Forscher haben vor kurzem auch eine Studie herausgebracht, wonach der Südalpenraum besonders betroffen sein wird, weil sich eben das Mittelmeer viel schneller aufwärmt. Das heißt wir werden Unwetter und Hochwasser viel regelmäßiger haben.

Ich bin nicht der Vorsitzende des Vereins AdJ – aber ich glaube, dass die Themen – die aufgezwungenen Themen in Wirklichkeit – die Jugend und was machen wir, lokal und weltweit, zum Thema Klimawandel sein werden.

Das heißt in diesem Kontext wird der Verein in Zukunft auch noch wichtiger werden?

Das glaube ich auch! Wir haben Sonthofen als markantes Beispiel. Als Sonthofen Alpenstadt des Jahres war, hatten die in einem Sommer, einem August, ein 100-jähriges Hochwasser, ein 200-jähriges Hochwasser und ein 500-jähriges Hochwasser – in einem Monat. Jetzt kann man sich vorstellen, die meisten Schutzbeuten sind auf 100-jährige Hochwasser ausgelegt – das hat bisher ganz gut funktioniert. Wenn wir hier aber 200-jährige Hochwasser bekommen – also entweder wir machen's freiwillig oder wir werden gezwungen – anders gehts nicht – und freiwillig ist billiger.

Interview 5: Villach (Redlein)

Do, 28.04.2022; 11-12h. Das Gespräch wurde via Zoom geführt.

Christine **REDLEIN** ist Konsulentin der Stadt Villach im Rahmen von AdJ, und arbeitet in der Stadtverwaltung Villachs, wobei sie die Geschäftsgruppe 3 (Finanzen und Wirtschaft) leitet.

Zu Villach wurden zwei Interviews geführt, einmal mit Christina Redlein, der Konsulentin, und einmal mit Gerhard Leeb, einem langjährigen Wegbegleiter mit mit-Initiatoren des Netzwerkes. In dem Interview mit Gerhard Leeb steht die Gründungsgeschichte im Vordergrund, während mit Christina Redlein die aktuelle Situation und die Situation Villachs stärker zur Aussprache kommt. Die beiden Interviews folgen daher nicht zu hundert Prozent dem grundsätzlichen Schema.

Einleitung

Was sind deine Positionen in der Stadt Villach und im Rahmen von Alpenstadt des Jahres?

Also ich bin eingeordnet vom Organigramm her in der Geschäftsgruppe 3, das ist Finanzen und Wirtschaft. Wir haben 5 Geschäftsgruppen, und ich bin da im Finanzbereich. Da habe ich eine Stabsstelle für Wirtschaft, das umfasst Wirtschaft, relativ umfangreich. Alles was man nicht irgendwo zuordnen kann ist irgendwo Wirtschaft oder Finanzen.

Hauptsächlich, vom Titel her, für Wirtschaftsförderung und Betriebsansiedlung, das umfasst die Ansiedlungen in der Innenstadt, Start-ups die wir unterstützen. Wir machen immer nach Themen Förderungsschwerpunkte, sowie aktuell für die Innenstadt. Da sagt man, okay, wie kann man die Innenstadt entwickeln, wie können wir da die richtigen Anreize setzen weil es ja in den Innenstädten zu relativen Aussterben der kleineren Geschäfte kommt. Wir haben zum Beispiel eine Gutscheinkarte abgewickelt, wo man Gutscheine für Einkäufe in der Innenstadt bekommt.

Dann bin ich von den Beteiligungen der Stadt Villach, wo wir ja einige haben, da habe ich das Camping-Bad am Ossiacher See, für das ich koordinativ zuständig bin. Dann habe ich von den Themen her noch den Naturpark Dobratsch, wo ich die Schnittstelle zur Stadt Villach bin und eben das Projekt Alpenstadt des Jahres, das auch bei mir ist. Vorher war das bei der Kollegin und durch Umstrukturierungen gehört es dann seit 2017 zu meinen Agenden.

Im Rahmen des Vereins bist du also die Konsulentin für Villach?

Ja, also ich bin einfach die Ansprechperson für den Verein, für Generalversammlungen und so weiter. Es ist einfach ein Teilbereich von ganz vielen Agenden, die ich betreue. Vor mir war das die Sabine Domenik, die das von Anfang an mit dem Gerhard Leeb gemeinsam gemacht hat. Die Kollegin hat dann aber intern gewechselt, womit ich das dann mit meinem Eintritt dazubekommen habe.

Du bist also seit 2017 zuständig?

Genau, bei den Alpenstädten kann man sagen seit Mitte 2017. Das hat mit der Jubiläumsfeier 20-Jahre begonnen, die in Villach stattgefunden hat. Es ist eine Jubiläumsfeier zu machen, hat es geheißen. Das war mein erster Berührungspunkt mit dem Verein. Das war im November oder Dezember 2017. Die hatte ich dann zu organisieren und den Ablauf zu planen. Das war so der erste Berührungspunkt.

A) Kurzfragen

1 + 2) Zur nächsten Frage, bezüglich der Gründung, habe ich auch schon mit Gerhard Leeb gesprochen. Nachdem du ja noch nicht so lange dabei bist, können wir das also gerne auslassen und gleich zur nächsten Frage weitergehen. Was würdest du sagen, sind die Städte, mit denen Villach im Netzwerk Villach am engsten kooperiert?

Genau, also, wenn du mit ihm gesprochen hast, kann ich dir da wahrscheinlich nichts neues sagen.

Ich muss sagen, dass wir aktuell über das Netzwerk Alpenstädte keine wirklichen Kooperation oder Projekte am Laufen haben. Erfahrungsgemäß und vom Thema her ist es am leichtesten mit denen, die geographisch am nächsten liegen, also Italien und Slowenien. Auch im Sinne von EU-grenzüberschreitenden Projekten ist es einfach am leichtesten hier etwas auf die Beine zu stellen. Wir sind alle in diesem Dreiländereck gewohnt, dass viele Dinge gemeinsam abgewickelt und bedacht werden.

2018, 2019 hatten wir zum Beispiel ein EU-Projekt mit Tarvis und Tolmezzo eingereicht, wo es um grenzüberschreitenden Lehrlingsaustausch ging, um Lehrling eben bewusst nicht universitär zu einem Austausch zu bewegen, um sich auch sprachlich zu öffnen. Haben wir dann leider nicht gekriegt, aber natürlich waren da auch Vorgespräche und Vorbereitungen zu tun.

Tolmezzo ist ja auch eine Alpenstadt. Dieses Projekt lief aber nicht über den Verein?

Nein, eben nicht über den Verein. Ich weiß gar nicht mehr wie. Wir hatten damals eine sehr Italien-affine Vizebürgermeisterin, über die das gelaufen ist. Ansonsten, Udine, Tarvis, Tolmezzo, in Slowenien Tolmin, Idrija, da wäre es so am leichtesten würd ich sagen, für konkrete Projekte.

3) Ist Villach denn Mitglied in anderen (transnationalen) Netzwerken im Alpenraum?

Also was wir haben sind diese Städtepartnerschaften. Aber in anderen Netzwerken, wie Allianz in den Alpen, nicht das ich wüsste. Aber wir sind natürlich eine riesige Unternehmung.

B) Alpenstadt des Jahres

1) Dann kommen wir weiter zum nächsten Teil. Welchen Input leistet Villach in dem Netzwerk?

Den jährlichen Mitgliedsbeitrag, seit Beginn an [lacht]. Also es beschränkt sich derzeit auf die Generalversammlungen. Die Rechnungsprüfung mache ich immer gemeinsam mit einem zweiten. Von den Events her war das letzte 2017 das Jubiläum, das bei uns war. Jetzt aktuell gibt es ein Projekt, das über die Alpenstädte läuft, das läuft aber über meine Kollegin. Da war das Thema irgendwas mit Begrünung ...

Climate Action in Alpine Towns?

... genau, das wirds sein. Bei uns haben sich da aber die Rahmenbedingung geändert, weil wir da ein Projekt gehabt hätten, dass wir da in Aussicht hatten, aber das hat sich jetzt geändert, da sind wir glaube ich gerade am überlegen was ein anderes Projekt angeht. Es geht da um eine Baumallee in der Innenstadt, glaube ich. Ich habe das aber an die Kollegin weitergeben, weil wir eben eine eigene Energiekoordinatorin haben, das ist in der Geschäftsgruppe 2 angesiedelt. Da habe ich die beiden verknüpft, also unsere Zuständigen und den Verein.

Ansonsten als Input ... was haben da die anderen so gesagt, aus deiner Erfahrung?

Also das könnte eben Initiieren von Projekten sein, gegenseitige Besuche oder oft auch nur Erfahrungsaustausch in verschiedensten Themenbereichen.

Okay ja ... also da war das letzte bei uns, veranstaltungsmäßig, eben 2017. Erfahrungsaustausch - hmm - ja schon aber jetzt nicht so direkt als Input gesehen. Aber prinzipiell schon ja. Aber das jetzt jemand direkt auf uns zugekommen wäre, weil er etwas von uns wissen wollte, das wäre mir jetzt nicht bekannt. Heißt aber nicht, dass es nicht so war, sondern nur das ich jetzt nichts davon weiß.

2) Umgekehrt, welchen Output zieht Villach aus dem Netzwerk? Wofür wird das Netzwerk genutzt?

Es fließt aber trotzdem bei uns ein! Einfach weil das bei uns in Villach gegründet wurde, passiert da viel was die Bewusstseinsbildung. Auch wenn es nicht immer unter dem Titel Alpenstadt geht, fließt das immer schon bei uns ein. Dass sich Villach immer bestimmte grüne Ziele und Maßnahmen ganz oben ansetzt. Das ist sicher schon ein Output, oder Mehrwert.

Also das Villach sich bewusst als Alpenstadt sieht und deshalb auch nachhaltige arbeiten will?

Genau, Gerhard wird vielleicht eh auch gesagt haben, was bei uns damals direkt aus dem Alpenstadtgedanken entstanden ist Zum Beispiel der Naturpark Dobratsch, wo man eben bewusst Skilifte abgebaut hat und den ersten Naturpark Kärntens geschaffen hat. Wo man naturnahes Erholungsleben nahe der Stadt, nicht Skigebiet, hat. Das war damals die Initialzündung dafür, als es 1995 sicher nicht einfach war, die Villacher davon zu überzeugen. Das ist unser Hausberg. Wo ich wohne, da bin ich in 15min beim letzten Parkplatz oben zum Skifahren. Mittlerweile ist das wahrscheinlich eine der besten Nutzungen, die man sich hätte vorstellen können. Da ist vom Rodeln bis zum Wandern, Skitouren gehen, eher ruhiger, alles dabei. Dieses Projekt ist ja schon über 20 Jahre her, und heuer, haben wir, nachdem der Naturpark so umgesetzt wurde, ein neues Mobilitätskonzept vorgestellt, wo wir öffentlichen Verkehr dorthin verstärkt. Und Parken kostenpflichtig gemacht haben, und damit das Individualverkehrsaufkommen am Dobratsch um 25% verringern konnten, heuer erstmals.

Wir haben heuer erstmals einen autofreien Tag, wo natürlich Villach dazuzahlt, denn das ist im Sommer eine Mautstraße. Da stimmt die Villacher Mautstraßenverwaltung natürlich nur zu, wenn sie den Kostensatz bekommt. Aber da ist Villach immer ganz vorne dabei, wenn es um solche Dinge geht. Also dieses Thema ist schon immer noch aktuell und entwickelt sich immer weiter.

Der Alpenstadtgedanke ist also immer mit dabei, aber steht nicht direkt im Vordergrund?

Genau so ist es wahrscheinlich ... wir sind so vieles, wir sind E5-Gemeinde, wir sind Fair-Trade-Stadt, wir möchten Digitalisierung voranbringen, aber der Gedanke ist natürlich immer ähnlich. Aber ich weiß nicht wie bekannt AdJ tatsächlich ist ... ich weiß nicht, wie ist das in anderen Städten ... wie ist da deine Erfahrung? Ich sage bei uns, im Vergleich zu den anderen Dingen, die sind beim Durchschnittsbürger ein stärkeres Wort, ein stärkeres Zugpferd, wenn ich jetzt schnell etwas vermarkten will. Es gibt einfach viele andere Schlagworte, die einfach viele dieser Dinge, Nachhaltigkeit, Grün, Regionalität, mitabdecken.

Das ist sicher in anderen Alpenstädten ähnlich ... natürlich sind aber viele der Alpenstädte deutlich kleiner, also vielleicht auch nicht in so vielen Initiativen mit drinnen, wodurch Alpenstadt des Jahres stärker zur Geltung kommt.

Am Dobratsch haben wir auch den Alpenstadt Infopunkt, den haben wir letztes Jahr umgesetzt. Also damit haben wir auch wieder einen Akzent gesetzt. Ich könnte noch viele Dinge aufzählen, und vieles davon geht auch auf diesen Anfang zurück. Also wir in der Stadt leben das ganz stark, auch durch unseren Bürgermeister.

Vielleicht ist die Größe aber auch ein Faktor, ich weiß aber nicht, wie das in anderen Städten ist, ich denke das wohl auch kleinere Städte Dinge wie Klimabündnis, E5, Fair-trade ebenfalls haben ... und auch auf diese Themen und Marketing-Effekte setzen. Aber es interessiert mich natürlich wie, dass auch in anderen Städten ist.

3)

Aber das ist irgendwo sicher auch von der großen Organisationsstruktur gegeben. Damit kommen wir jetzt vielleicht eh auch zu dem Punkt mit dem „networken“ – ich sitze in der Finanz- und Wirtschaftsabteilung, wo es um Projekte geht wie Innenstadt, Betriebsansiedlung, nachhaltiges Wirtschaften, das ist genau mein Ding. Aber wenn's jetzt um Jugend, oder Jugendbeteiligung geht, weißt eh, da kenn ich mich nicht so aus - was die eigentlich gerade so für Projekte haben. Da wäre für mich hilfreich, wenn ich sagen kann, das ist die richtige Ansprechperson, macht ihr euch das aus. Ich lad dann auch die Person zu den Sitzungen ein. Wir haben 1000 Mitarbeiter, da macht jeder einfach einen kleineren Bereich. Da habe ich 15 Themen drinnen, die wichtig sind, und da ist eine Anfrage drinnen, die stellt man dann natürlich hinten an. Da gibt es einfach Dinge, die sind wichtiger. Wenn du da nach Frankreich fährst zu einem Meeting, das sind für mich in Summe, ich habe 6 Stunden a Tag theoretische Arbeitsstunden, das sind für mich 3 Tage, das ist ein halbes Wochenpensum. Aber da gäbe es natürlich auch noch andere Dinge zu tun. Das sind dann Dinge, wo man sagt, dass pressiert nicht so. Wir haben dann natürlich auch Kooperation mit anderen Gemeinden, das ist eine Spur leichter, auch was die Sprachliche Barriere angeht. Manche Alpenstädte sind so weit weg, dass ich da auch einfach den Anknüpfungspunkt nicht sehe.

Als Anregung wäre das sicher, dass man zwar jemanden hat bei der Stadt bei der Stadt Villach, der die Rechnungsprüfung, Generalversammlung macht, klar, aber in den Fachbereich einfach nur sagt, wer ist mein richtiger Kontakt, stell mir den Kontakt her – auch was Kultur und Soziales und Jugend, Integration und so weiter angeht. Dass ich zwischen Themen und Fachbereich koordiniere und dazwischen geschnitten bin. Dass man also wirklich die Fachleute zusammenbringt.

Und das läuft aber aktuell nicht so?

Jetzt, mit der Energiekoordination war es eh so. Das hat super gepasst, weil ich da auch gerade mit der Kollegin gesprochen habe und gesagt habe, du, gibt's irgendwas an Projekten, wo du dir vorstellen kannst, dass du von einer Kooperation profitierst. Was machst du aktuell für Projekte, kannst du was mit diesen Schlagworten anfangen? Sie hat gesagt, ja, das passiert perfekt mit dem was wir nächstes Jahr machen. Damit war ich fachlich nicht mehr involviert, kann ich auch nicht, ist nicht mein Themenbereich.

Also vielleicht ist es auch ein bisschen die Größe der Stadt und diese Organisationsstruktur, die das eine Spur schwerer machen. Es wird einfach oft hinten angestellt, ist einfach so. Und mit Corona ist es schon einfach so, dadurch das persönliche Treffen nicht stattgefunden haben, da entsteht dieses Ungeplante auch einfach weniger. Beim after-work, was einfach so nebenbei entsteht, das entsteht einfach auch dadurch weniger.

4) Im Vergleich zu anderen Netzwerken, wo denkst du, liegt der spezielle Mehrwert von „AdJ“?

Ja also, wie gesagt, speziell eben, dass es, wenn auch unterbewusst, in viele Überlegung und Entscheidungen der Politik mit einfließt. Von der nachhaltigen Mobilität bis zur Entscheidung von Stadtentwicklung, wie die zu sein hat. Ich glaube, wo ich am ehesten den Mehrwert sehe, ist in den nahegelegenen Alpenstädten, weil wir uns einfach geographisch sehr nahe sind und auch im Austausch und Bewusstsein gewisse Ähnlichkeiten und Nähe haben. Natürlich sind wir uns ähnlicher ... aber natürlich gibt es wieder Unterschiede, da kämpft ja jeder mit anderen Herausforderungen. Aber das würde ich schon sagen, diese ähnlichen Bedingungen, denen wir uns stellen ... aber eben die, die nahe gelegen sind.

C) Villach

1) Im Gegensatz zu den anderen Alpenstädten wurde der Titel Villachs nicht von der Jury auf Basis spezieller Nachhaltigkeit-Projekte verliehen. Welche Initiativen bzw. Schwerpunkte setzt Villach in Sachen nachhaltiger Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung? Welche Themenbereiche bearbeitet Villach da im speziellen?

Nachhaltige Mobilität, vom E-Citybus, E-Scooter, da waren wir auch relativ früh dabei, Dobratsch habe ich schon erwähnt, Verbesserungen der Grünzonen, in der Wirtschaftsförderung ist es mitberücksichtigt, wie regional nachhaltige ein Unternehmen ist. Wie förderbar ein Unternehmen aus unserer Sicht ist, hängt auch davon ab.

Dann haben wir jetzt gerade ein Projekt, bedarfsgerechte Beleuchtung, wo wir glaube ich, die erste Stadt sind, die das jetzt mal probiert. Bedarfsgerechte Beleuchtung gibt es, aber im öffentlichen Bereich muss man natürlich viele, auch rechtliche Aspekte bedenken. Da haben wir gerade ein Projekt, einfach auch zu Ressourcenschonung, wo die Straße nur dann beleuchtet wird, wenn Sensoren herannahende Autos entdecken.

Dann haben wir Wasserzähler, die nicht nur den Durchlauf sondern auch die Temperatur messen. Die sind mit Funk verbunden, daher kann man sehr schnell reagieren, wenn man merkt dass da irgendwo möglicherweise Wasser austritt, um Wasser zu sparen. Da sind wir die zweite Gemeinde in Österreich die das versucht.

Dann haben wir ein 3D-Stadtmodell, wo die Hitzeinseln im Sommer dargestellt werden sollen, und auch der Fluss von Wasser. Wasserflüsse werden in dem Modell dargestellt, sodass man diese auffangen kann. Wir machen gerade in jedem Stadtbereich das „Grüne Eck“, also Aufenthaltsflächen im Grünen. In jedem Ortsteil soll so ein grünes Eck entstehen, wo sich die Anrainer gerne aufhalten.

Wir haben Bushaltestellen begrünt, wir fördern Vereine die grüne Dinge in Ortskernen planen, wir haben Sprühnebel, also Kühlungseffekte. Alles was es also umzusetzen gibt, oder gab, oder da ist, haben wir [lacht].

2) Was sind spezifische Problemstellungen in der Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung Villachs? Inwieweit kann das Netzwerk „AdJ“ die Stadt dabei unterstützen?

Aus meinem Bereich gesprochen, was ich wirklich beeindruckend fand, war in Brixen. Wir haben wirklich, wie viele Städte, dieses Thema der sterbenden Innenstädte. Und ich habe das Gefühl, dass das dort anders ist, und nicht überladen durch Filialen ist, sondern es auch kleinere Geschäfte gibt. Also da würde mich schon interessieren, wie das die anderen Alpenstädte machen - haben die auch dieses Problem, wie machen wir das?

Wir haben im Umland einen Widmungstop für Innenstadt-relevante-Branchen gemacht, um die Innenstadt zu stärken. Wir haben versucht, mit solchen Dingen zu arbeiten, aber es ist schwierig, weil die Unternehmen auf der anderen Seite sagen, wir würden aber so-und-so viele Arbeitsplätze schaffen. Es ist eine schwierige Herausforderung, alle Interessen zu berücksichtigen.

Belebung von Innenstädten könnte also ein Thema sein, das man auch innerhalb des Vereins thematisieren könnte?

Das wäre Mal so ein Thema. Vielleicht gibt es da eine Alpenstadt, die sagt, wir haben dieses Problem nicht – und die Begründung dafür. Und ob diese Ansätze in anderen Städten umzusetzen sein werden ... da gibt es ja auch rechtliche und strukturelle Unterschiede. Wir haben uns da schon oft andere Städte angeschaut, aber so wirklich etwas, das wir übernehmen können, hat es nicht gegeben. Weil die Städte, die etwas besser machen, haben wir nicht so übernehmen können, weil andere es andere Rahmenbedingungen gab. Oder generell wo entwickeln sich die Innenstädte hin? – Richtung Park, Aufenthalt, Freizeit, Erlebnisflächen vielleicht? Vielleicht könnte man sich mal zu diesen Tendenzen austauschen.

Aber ich rede da natürlich nur aus meinem Bereich.

Wer müsste da den ersten Schritt machen? Könnte diese Initiative von Villach kommen, oder erwartet man sich schon, dass das zunächst von Vereinsseite angeregt wird?

Ich könnte mir da zunächst mal einen Austausch vorstellen. Das man da vielleicht diejenigen in der Stadt, die in den jeweiligen Städten für diese Themen zuständig sind, dass die vielleicht ein bisschen was dazu erzählen, damit man sieht, ob man vielleicht etwas übernehmen kann. Dann kann man sehen, welche Projektmöglichkeit es da überhaupt gäbe.

Könnte ich natürlich direkt ansprechen, würde das dann zum Beispiel bei der nächsten Generalversammlung mitnehmen, vielleicht gibt es ein Zeitfenster, wo man das ansprechen kann. Dass man sagt, wir haben das Thema so-und-so, welche Stadt hat da ein Best-Practice-Beispiele dazu? Im Alltag haben wir uns in Österreich und Deutschland natürlich schon viele Städte angeschaut ... das macht man!

Das würde ich einfach mal mitnehmen, würde mir aber nicht separat neben anderen Dingen ein Riesenprojekt aufhalsen. Das wäre mein Zugang, ob dann ein Projekt oder konkrete Zusammenarbeit, ob mit einer anderen Stadt, mit dem Verein oder als EU-Projekt entsteht, das wäre dann die Folge, wenn man mal spricht. Ich würde das am ehesten im Rahmen eines nächsten Meetings, wo wir alle zusammenkommen, machen, fragen ob wir das mal in die Agenda nehmen können.

3) Obwohl die Stadt Villach bereits so lange Teil des Netzwerkes ist, wurde bisher nur an wenigen Projekten teilgenommen. Welche Anreize bzw. welche Art von Projekten würdest du dir wünschen, um stärker an Projekten teilzunehmen – abgesehen von dem was du gerade erwähnt hast?

Das war jetzt Mal was mit so spontan eingefallen wäre. Sonst ... Also ich glaube das es speziell, also unsererseits, in dem Bereich Energiekoordination, Ressourcenschonen, Mobilität, nachhaltige Entwicklung, Möglichkeiten gibt. Ich glaube, dass das der richtige - für uns einfach - Ansatz ist, dass das die richtigen Faktoren sind. Ich glaub, dass wir da auch am ehesten Projekte abwickeln können. Können und wollen!

Ich glaube, dass das auch bei unserer politischen Führung ganz wichtig ist, und das es da auch am leichtesten ist, in Sachen Abholung von Förderungen, mehr noch, glaube ich, als in den mir bisher bekannten Bereichen getan wurde, ist meine persönliche Einschätzung.

Ich vertrete da natürlich nicht alle politischen Vertreter!

Glaubst du, dass die Information, welche Projekte es aber gibt, ausreichend an die Alpenstädte gebracht wird? Werdet ihr darüber informiert, was gemacht wird?

Ich glaube die Information ist da, aber es ist natürlich etwas anderes, ob man eine Email kriegt, die an alle geht, oder wenn man vielleicht ein persönliche Gespräch hat. Schau wir hätten so eine coole Idee, das wäre die Möglichkeit, da könnte man das-und-das machen. Und daraus gibt es die Möglichkeit, über die EU-Fördergelder, 80% dessen was man investiert gefördert zu bekommen, und man könnte dann daraus so konkret profierten ... das ist weiter als, es gibt ein Projekt, man kann teilnehmen, es geht um ...

Aber da muss ich wieder sagen, ich habe einfach sehr viele Agenden am Tisch. Da sind einfach sehr viele Themen zu bearbeiten.

Bevor wir weitergehen möchte ich nochmal kurz zum Projekt „Climate Change in Alpine Towns“ nachfragen. Ob ihr da jetzt noch dabei seid, weißt du auch nicht? Online lässt sich das nicht nachvollziehen.

Soweit ich weiß, macht das die Kollegien. Wir wollen da in der Innenstadt jetzt eine grüne Alle machen, aber da sind wir, soweit ich weiß, noch am Prüfen ob das dafür auch funktioniert, soweit ich weiß. Das ist bei der Frau Ursula Lackner. Soweit ich verstanden habe, sind wir da dabei. Aber ich kann da jetzt nicht sagen, wie der Projektstatus ist, ob wir da noch Partner sind, bzw. ob das noch in Schwebe ist.

D) Ausblick

1) Wem / Welcher Art von Stadt würdest du empfehlen dem Netzwerk beizutreten?

Ja Ausblick ... gefühlt, aus meiner Erfahrung, grundsätzlich eher kleineren Städte, Gemeinden. Ich denke, dass das für die Gemeinden auch sehr attraktiv ist. Die Frage ist, ob der Mitgliedsbeitrag für die tragbar ist, ob man für kleinere Städte Abstufungen macht. Ich weiß nicht, wie das dann empfunden wird. Ich glaube, die profitieren einfach mehr von solchen Netzwerken, sind flexibler. Gerade wenn dann nicht für jeden Teilbereich Fachkräfte angestellt sind, und man sich dann eben auch etwas anschauen kann von anderen.

2) Wo sehen Sie die Zukunft des Netzwerkes „AdJ“?

Die Zukunft ... das kann ich ganz schwer einschätzen. Ich empfinde nach Corona-Krise, nach gewissen Instabilitäten in Europa ... schwer zu sagen. Du weißt eh, wo man am ehesten dann vielleicht spart, wenn es nötig ist. Wir haben turbulente Jahre hinter uns ... und es wird offenbar so schnell nicht besser. Aber in stabiler, wirtschaftlicher und politischer Umgebung sehe ich das durchaus positiv.

Interview 6: Brixen – Bressanone

Die Fragen wurden zunächst in groben Stichworten schriftlich beantwortet. Im Anschluss wurde in einem Telefonat auf einige Fragen noch genauer eingegangen. Das Telefonat fand am 19.05. von 16:00-16:30 statt.

Gerade – Ursprüngliche Fragen und schriftliche Antworten

Kursiv – telefonische Ergänzungen.

Einleitung

Was ist deine Position in der Stadt Brixen und im Rahmen von Alpenstadt des Jahres?

[Keine schriftliche Antwort]

Kurz zu deiner Position: du bist also der Alpenstadt-Konsulent für Brixen? Und in Brixen bist du im Stadtrat?

Ganz genau. Im Gemeinderat bin ich auch, als Stadtrat, also in der Stadtregierung. Insofern betreue ich das. Im Verein aber abgesehen davon keine Aufgaben und Positionen. Ich bin auch gefragt worden wegen dem Vorstand, aber das schaffe ich momentan nicht.

Stadtrat ist bei uns wie – also es gibt den Bürgermeister, dann das Regierungsteam mit insgesamt fünf Stadträten, und da bin ich dabei. Du findest das alles auch auf der Gemeinde-Brixen-website, wenn du unter Politik reingehst und Stadtrat, und dann unter meinem Namen. Aber meine Aufgaben sind dann vor allem auch das Thema Umwelt, Nachhaltigkeit, auch das Thema Europa, dann natürlich auch die ganzen Sachen, die da noch reinfallen, Innovation, Freizeit, Fahrradwege, ländlichen Raum und so ja.

Okay ja! Da macht das dann natürlich Sinn auch die Alpenstadt, passt ja gut in die Agenden mit rein.

Genau, vor allem Umwelt und Nachhaltigkeit.

A) Kurzfragen

[die Kurzfragen wurden im telefonischen Interview nicht nochmal behandelt, da bereits ausreichend beantwortet.]

1) Was war der ausschlaggebende Grund, dass Brixen 2018 dem Netzwerk „AdJ“ beigetreten ist?

Zu diesem Zeitpunkt war es der Stadtregierung ein Anliegen, das Bewusstsein in der Bevölkerung für die Werte zu stärken, für die das Netzwerk steht

2) Mit welchen Städten im Netzwerk kooperiert Brixen am engsten?

vor allem mit Städten, die uns räumlich näher sind und sprachlich näher scheinen pflegen wir intensiveren Kontakt

aktuelle Kooperationen, die auf das Netzwerk zurückzuführen sind, gibt es derzeit nicht

3) Ist Brixen Mitglied anderer (transnationaler) Netzwerke im Alpenraum?

Euregio Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino

B) Alpenstadt des Jahres

1) Welchen Input leistet Brixen in dem Netzwerk?

vor allem in den Bereichen Nachhaltigkeit und Jugend versuchen wir mit unseren Erfahrungen aus Projekten einige Inputs den Netzwerkpartnern zu geben.

2) Welchen Output zieht Brixen aus dem Netzwerk? Wofür wird das Netzwerk genutzt?

Informationen, Best Practice Beispiele, Erfahrungsberichte

Dann vielleicht zu Input / Output bezüglich des Netzwerks. Hier hast du ja auch schon einiges geschrieben. Möchtest du da noch was hinzufügen?

Ich kann das gerne auch noch etwas ausführen. Also Input ist natürlich, wie bereits geschrieben, Nachhaltigkeit und Jugend. Da gibt es viele Projekte, wo Brixen auch Vorreiter ist, gerade in den Bereichen Mobilität, Energie, da ist Brixen schon wirklich Vorreiter, auch im Alpenraum. Und da versucht man natürlich schon auch, diese Projekte dann auch zu teilen.

In den Gesprächen mit den anderen Städten ist Brixen auch durchaus manchmal zur Sprache gekommen. Du würdest also sagen, dass dahingehend schon reger Austausch stattfindet?

Ja, klar. Da ist es schon vorgekommen, dass unsere Projekte auch vorgestellt wurden, hat auch schon Austausch gegeben mit anderen Städten, die dann hergekommen sind, zum Beispiel unser Fernwärmeprojekt ist angeschaut worden. Es wurde geschaut, wie das richtig funktioniert, wie das operativ funktioniert.

Würdest du sagen, dass dieser Austausch regelmäßig stattfindet?

Genau schon, jetzt nicht unglaublich, aber immer wieder Mal.

3) Welches sind Hindernisse / Herausforderungen beim „networken“?

wie es für das Netzwerken generell gilt, der Zeitmangel.

Zu den Hindernissen hast du ja geschrieben, dass das hauptsächlich der Zeitmangel ist. Meinst du damit von deiner Seite aus, weil du zum Beispiel auch noch so viele anderen Agenden hast, die du betreuen musst?

Ja natürlich, das ist schon auf die Aufgaben zurückzuführen, und auf der anderen Seite, dass man manche Sache vielleicht besser digitalisieren könnte. Weißt du, dass der Austausch dann nicht immer nur über Mails geht, sondern vielleicht gibt es ja in Zukunft innovativere Plattformen. Wenn eine Gemeinde jetzt ein Projekt macht, kriege ich das nicht immer direkt mit, außer wir besprechen das jetzt zufällig vor Ort. Aber das wäre für mich schon so ein großer Punkt, wo ich sage, da könnte man noch viel aufholen, da könnte man noch in die Kommunikation investieren. Natürlich, es muss immer verträglich sein, bezüglich Zeit, bezüglich Ressourcen die man hat. Aber hier, denke ich, könnte man ein bisschen innovativer arbeiten. Ich habe jetzt nicht die Lösung, aber ich denke zum Beispiel Microsoft Teams, die Funktionen die es dort gibt, ist immer wieder spannend, auch da zu arbeiten. Da tuen sich, gerade die Jungen, sage ich jetzt Mal, immer ein bisschen schwer immer nur mit Mails und so. Und es ist natürlich auch ein wenig distanzierter, ich glaube du weißt eh was ich meine, es ist halt ein bisschen unpersönlicher. Also das ganze Thema Digitalisierung und Kommunikation untereinander, das wäre mir noch ein wichtiger Punkt.

Also möglicherweise auch im Bezug auf die Treffen, die stattfinden, wo es ja nicht immer jedem möglich ist teilzunehmen, auch aufgrund von Zeit und Distanz, online stattfinden könnten?

Ja, schon, aber man muss auch sagen, Online-Treffen sind schon ganz was anderes, weil diese ganzen Gespräche hat man dann einfach nicht, in den Pausen, beim Essen. Also das tut schon sehr gut, da ist man zwei Tage zusammen, das ist schon sehr wichtig.

4) Im Vergleich zu anderen Netzwerken, wo liegt der spezielle Mehrwert von „AdJ“?

Der Alpenraum birgt einige grundsätzliche Gemeinsamkeiten, die ein gutes Fundament für gegenseitigen Austausch bilden.

Dann können wir auch zur nächsten Frage weitergehen. Da ist eben die Frage wo der Mehrwert von AdJ liegt. Die Frage ist hier auch dahingehend zu verstehen, wo der *spezielle* Mehrwert dieses Netzwerkes liegt, was hier besonders geleistet werden kann, im Vergleich vielleicht auch zu anderen Netzwerken. Wo siehst du da Punkte?

Als mein ganz persönliches Erlebnis, oder meine persönliche Meinung zu dem Thema, es ist einfach so, man tauscht sich natürlich mit den Städten aus, die Nahe liegen, die wirklich in der Nähe sind, bei uns speziell im Südtirol-Raum aus. Ist auch sehr interessant, wenn man sieht, was da passiert. Aber was jetzt in Städten wie Belluno, Passy passiert, natürlich kriegt man das einfach nicht so mit. Aber wenn man dort *war*, sieht man, dass die eben auch mit ähnlichen Dingen zu hantieren haben. Die Mischung zwischen ländlichem und städtischem Raum, Mobilität, Digitalisierung, die Nachhaltigkeit in verschiedenen Bereichen, das Thema Energie. Also man sieht einfach, wie dort unglaubliche viele Gemeinsamkeiten, ich sage jetzt Schwierigkeiten, das ist aber nicht negativ gemeint, eher Herausforderungen, bestehen. Wie kann ich das ländliche Gebiet ans Internet anschließen? – Ressourcenschonen, Energieversorgung, ...

Also da sehe ich einfach einen spannenden Mehrwert, in Form sich auszutauschen.

Also auch, dass man über die Gemeinden, mit denen man ohnehin in Austausch ist, hinausgehen kann?

Ganz genau ja, ganz genau.

C) Brixen-Bressanone

1) Der Titel „AdJ“ wird auch Anstoß dafür verliehen, auch in Zukunft auf nachhaltige Alpenpolitik zu setzen. Konnten in Brixen durch die Verleihung des Titels 2018 neue Projekte oder Initiativen dahingehend angestoßen werden?

- PUMS, Biciplan, Klimagemeinde, Solar, LED-Beleuchtung (www.brixen.it)

Dann können wir gerne auch zum nächsten Teil weitergehen, zu Brixen selbst. Du hast hier ja schon einige Projekte aufgeführt, die ich mir natürlich auch angesehen habe. Die Frage aber vielleicht auch dahingehend zu verstehen, ob Projekte dadurch angestoßen wurden, das Brixen Alpenstadt geworden ist? Oder war man ohnehin schon auf diesem Pfad, sozusagen?

Also da muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen, da war man schon davor auf diesem Weg, das ist jetzt nicht durch Alpenstadt des Jahres entstanden. Aber wo man muss nicht immer unbedingt neue Projekte anfangen, man kann da natürlich auch bestehende weiterverfolgen. Da gab es zum Beispiel den Fahrradplan in Brixen, Klimagemeinde sind wir geworden, das sind natürlich alles Projekte, die sind unglaublich wichtig, aber sind jetzt nicht speziell durch AdJ entstanden.

Aber da sind schon immer natürlich kleinere Themen angestoßen worden, kleinere Initiativen. Aber auch hier, noch Mal, wenn man hier durch die Digitalisierung eine gemeinsame Plattform schaffen könnte, dann wäre der Austausch auch leichter, dann könnte man sich auch hinsichtlich dessen verbessern. Das heißt, das ich nicht anfragen muss, oder selbst recherchieren muss auf der Website der Gemeinde – das könnte ich natürlich machen, aber du weißt eh, das macht man dann nicht, und wenn dann ist es eh schon zu spät – also da würde ich noch Potenzial für Austausch sehen.

Vielleicht noch zu dieser Frage, weil du ja am Anfang erwähnt hast, dass einer der Gründe, oder der Hauptgrund, Alpenstadt des Jahres beizutreten - oder sich dafür zu bewerben - war, dass man das Bewusstsein bezüglich Nachhaltigkeit in der Bevölkerung stärken möchte. Ist das gelungen?

Absolut, das kann man wirklich sagen! Ich bin der Meinung, man muss beim Thema Nachhaltigkeit konkrete Schritte setzen, nicht nur philosophieren, sage ich jetzt mal, sondern auch konkrete Schritte setzen. Damit auch die Menschen sehen, dass etwas passiert. Auf der anderen Seite braucht es natürlich auch Initiativen, um Digitalisierung voranzutreiben, und dafür ist AdJ wirklich ein hervorragender Partner, das zu machen. Die Menschen sehe, dass da auch etwas für mehr Zusammenhalt im Alpenraum gemacht wird, das es ein gemeinsames Anliegen ist, das Ganze. Und da versuchen wir schon, die Bevölkerung mitzunehmen, was auch gelingt.

Würdest du sagen, dass die Leute, also die Einwohner von Brixen, auch wissen, dass Brixen AdJ ist?

Ich würde mich jetzt nicht trauen, dass so zu sagen, aber es ist bei ganz vielen Mails an die Gemeinde immer wieder dabei. Natürlich muss man sagen, 2018 sind wir Alpenstadt geworden, dann war das wirklich ein ganz großes Thema, aber du weißt eh, die Halbwertszeit verringert sich natürlich. Die Leute vergessen das sicher viel.

Ich denke, da würde es auch in dieser Hinsicht immer wieder guttun, dass durch gemeinsame Pressearbeit, vor Ort.

--- Unterbrechung aufgrund technischer Störungen ---

So jetzt funktioniert wieder!

Wo war ich gerade?

Bei gemeinsamer Pressearbeit, Bewusstsein in der Bevölkerung stärken ...

Ja, also was ich damit sagen will, das finde ich schon wichtig, dass hier einfach noch besser kommuniziert wird, dass die Gemeinden auch gemeinsame Pressearbeit leisten. Dass man hier auch für die Sensibilisierung ein bisschen mehr machen könnte, weil es ist einfach fact, dass die Leute das wieder schnell vergessen.

2) Was sind spezifische Problemstellungen in der Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung Brixens? Inwieweit kann das Netzwerk „AdJ“ die Stadt dabei unterstützen?

3) Als junges Mitglied des Netzwerkes hat Brixen, abgesehen vom „Konvent der Bürgermeister“ bisher noch bei keinen „AdJ“-Projekten mitgewirkt. Welches wären Anreize, damit die Stadt an kommenden Projekten mitwirkt?

[keine schriftliche Antwort]

Dann zu dem zweiten Punkt, zu spezifischen Problemstellungen. Die Frage ist so gemeint, wo du spezifische Problemstellungen siehst, wo du, wo Brixen sagt, hier könnten wir vielleicht Hilfe gebrauchen, auf das Netzwerk zurückgreifen?

Grundsätzlich natürlich das ganze Thema Nachhaltigkeit, finde ich schon spannend, wenn hier ein Austausch stattfindet. Sei es bei den ganzen Natur-Themen, sei es bei Energie. Ich habe erst letztes eine tolle Initiative gesehen, zu Bienen. Ich sage, das sind so kleinere Themen, Bienenfreundliche Stadt, wo AdJ ein Netzwerk aufbauen kann, wo ein Austausch stattfinden kann. Wo wir aber gleichzeitig auch eine Pressearbeit, bzw. eine Kommunikationsmöglichkeit haben, um hier weiter zu sensibilisieren und weiter zu versuchen, diese Themen ein wenig in den Mittelpunkt zu stellen.

Und, anschließend auch an die nächste Frage, welche Art von Projekten, denkst du, könnte man im Alpenstadt-Kontext besonders gut durchführen? Brixen hat ja bisher noch an keinen AdJ-Projekten teilgenommen, welche Art von Projekten würdest du dir vielleicht wünschen?

Kannst du mir Beispiele aufzählen, oder wie meinst du das, welche Projekte? Wenn ich jetzt zum Beispiel auf die AdJ-Seite reingehe, wo würde ich das sehen?

Also es gibt da einen Reiter, Aktivitäten, dann Projekte. Die meisten davon sind natürlich schon abgeschlossen, aber beispielsweise aktuell gerade „Climate Action in Alpine Towns“, oder vor kurzem abgeschlossen wurde „Alps 2030“. Aber so, wie ich das jetzt heraushöre, weißt du gar nicht, dass es diese Projekte gibt?

Da bin ich ganz offen, ich weiß da von ganz wenigen Projekten Bescheid, ich bin natürlich auch erst seit eineinhalb Jahren dabei. Natürlich sind diese Projekte auch alles schon davor gestartet.

Aber wir wären auf alle Fälle, „Climate Action“, „Fotowettbewerb“, auch mit der Jugend, wir würden da 100-prozentig dabei, hier mitzumachen. Also da sind ganz open-minded.

Okay! Aber aus eurer Seite würde man sich eher erwarten, dass diese Projekte von Vereinsseite initiiert und herangetragen werden, oder könnte man sich auch vorstellen, selbst ein Projekt vorzuschlagen und dann Partner zu suchen?

Ich verstehe, die Frage ist besser als die Antwort [lacht]. Klar, wir sagen natürlich, wir erwarten das AdJ auf uns mit Projekten zukommt – ob es das richtige ist, natürlich muss sich jede Gemeinde auch mit einbringen. Absolut berechnete Frage.

D) Ausblick

1) Wem / Welcher Art von Stadt würdest du empfehlen dem Netzwerk beizutreten?

Ich glaube, dass nachhaltige Politik allen Städten des Alpenraums ein Anliegen sein sollte, also gibt es in meinen Augen vermutlich kaum Städte, die nicht beitreten sollten.

2) Wo siehst du die Zukunft des Netzwerkes „AdJ“?

Größer und als Experten in alpenspezifischer nachhaltiger Politik. – Der Klimawandel ist für die Alpen eine noch größere Herausforderung – dafür ist bedachtes und konkretes Handeln notwendig – hierbei kann das Netzwerk eine wichtige Rolle übernehmen

Dann sind wir auch schon am Schluss. Ganz interessant fand ich, da möchte ich noch kurz nachfragen, zur Zukunft des Netzwerkes, dass, wenn ich das richtig verstanden habe, das Netzwerk eigentlich noch größer, noch wichtiger werden müsste?

Also zur ersten Frage, welcher Stadt würdest du empfehlen, dem Netzwerk beizutreten. Also da kann man wirklich vielen raten, teilzunehmen. Das würde sicher vielen Städten guttun, nicht nur großen Städten, auch kleinen. Ich verstehe natürlich, dass gerade bei kleineren Städten vielleicht oft die Ressource ein Problem ist.

Die Zukunft des Netzwerkes – also es eines der wichtigsten Themen überhaupt, dass wir Alpen-spezifische nachhaltige Politik machen und diese auch ernstnehmen, dass wir gemeinsam diese großen Herausforderungen angehen und auch annehmen. Das ist wirklich unglaublich wichtig. Ich sehe hier auch alle Städte in der Pflicht, sich, wenn man sich auf einige wenige Projekte konzentriert, und es auch wirklich gut zu machen, und einfach zu versuchen, diesen Austausch zu intensivieren. Wie sagt man, besser gut kopiert als schlecht selbst gemacht. Man nimmt sich nichts gegenseitig weg! Man kann wirklich nur dazugewinnen.

Ich bin natürlich relativ neu dabei, war auch noch nicht bei so vielen Treffen mit dabei, auch COVID-bedingt, aber ich merke, dass dieser Austausch einfach unglaublich guttut.

Vielleicht noch zu Größe des Netzwerkes, du siehst es eher so, dass das Netzwerk eigentlich noch wachsen sollte?

Wachsen ist jetzt in meinen Augen vielleicht der falsche Ausdruck dafür das es größer werden sollte. Es soll qualitativ größer werden, es soll wirklich mehr Aufmerksamkeit dem Thema geschenkt werden. Ich denke die Qualität hängt jetzt nicht davon ab, ob jetzt noch 10 Gemeinden mehr mit dabei sind. Tut schon immer, gut, ein Austausch auch mit neuen Gemeinden, die dazukommen, die dann wieder eine neue Sichtweise haben. Aber ich mein es jetzt nicht nur von qualitativer Seite her, dass da jetzt 100 Leute dabei sein müssen. Ich denke eine große Stärke ist das nachhaltige Wachsen von AdJ, es bringt nichts, wenn man da z schnell wächst oder so.

Natürlich, wenn man noch mehr wächst mit Gemeinden, ist das toll, und vielleicht entstehen da ja wieder neue Verbindungen, absolut. Aber wie gesagt, es muss immer die Qualität im Vordergrund stehen.

Interview 7: Brig-Glis

27.06.2022, 10.00h - 10.45h

Das Interview wurde via Zoom durchgeführt und aufgezeichnet.

Monika **HOLZEGGER** arbeitet als externe Angestellte für die Gemeinde Brig-Glis und leitet den Verein „Alpenstadt Brig-Glis“, welcher AdJ-Projekte in der Gemeinde zuständig ist, seit zwei Jahren als Geschäftsführerin.

Fragen zu Teil (A) wurden schriftlich beantwortet und vorab zugesendet.

A) Kurzfragen

1) Was war der ausschlaggebende Grund, dass Brig-Glis 2008 dem Netzwerk „AdJ“ beigetreten ist?

Der ausschlaggebende Grund, sich um den Titel "Alpenstadt des Jahres" zu bewerben, war der Bau des neuen Basiseisenbahntunnels NEAT Lötschberg. Ähnlich wie vor 100 Jahren mit der Eröffnung 1906 des damals längsten Eisenbahntunnels der Welt durch den Simplon wollte die Stadtgemeinde Brig-Glis ein klares Zeichen gegen aussen und innen setzen, an der nachhaltigen Entwicklung des Alpenraums mitzuwirken und sich zu positionieren. Die Region Oberwallis ist ohnehin prädestiniert dazu, befinden sich doch hier die höchsten Erhebungen der europäischen Alpen (allein in der Gemeinde Zermatt befinden sich 29 Berge über 4'000 m.ü.M.) und das UNESCO-Weltnaturerbe mit dem weltbekannten Aletschgletscher.

2) Brig-Glis ist dem Netzwerk ja zwischenzeitlich aus- und wieder beigetreten. Was waren die Gründe dafür?

Falschinformation: Brig-Glis ist nie aus dem Netzwerk ausgetreten und hat stets eine aktive Rolle gespielt, sowohl durch die Teilnahme an Tagungen und an Projekten wie auch als Gastort für Mitgliederversammlungen.

Mit welchen Städten im Netzwerk kooperiert Brig-Glis am engsten?

Es gibt keine spezifischen Kooperationen mit anderen Städten. Brig-Glis pflegt den Gedankenaustausch mit allen. Auf dieser Basis ist beispielsweise die Veranstaltung "Berg Buch Brig" entstanden, die auf dem Projekt "Montagna Libri" in Trento beruht (ab 2022 auch mit Passy in FR). Der langjährige Verantwortliche für "Berg Buch Brig" ist Andreas Weissen aus Brig-Glis, ehemaliger Präsident der CIPRA und Mann der ersten Stunde von "Alpenstadt des Jahres".

Ist Brig-Glis Mitglied anderer (transnationaler) Netzwerke im Alpenraum?

Nein, Brig-Glis möchte nicht die Kräfte verzetteln und in weiteren Netzwerken mitwirken. Hingegen hat die Mitgliedschaft AdJ sicher zu einem stärkeren transnationalen Engagement beigetragen. Dieses begann 2006 mit der 100-Jahrfeier des Simplontunnels und der damit verbundenen Städtepartnerschaft mit Domodossola auf der italienischen Seite sowie mit einer Reihe von Interreg-Projekten, wovon eines mit Meran/Südtirol im Bereich "Smart Mobility". Treibende Kraft hinter diesen Aktivitäten war der damalige Stadtschreiber Eduard Brogli, Vertreter der Stadtgemeinde Brig-Glis im Verein "Alpenstadt des Jahres".

Die Einleitung bzw. die Teile (B),(C), (D) wurden von Monika Holzegger im Interview mündlich beantwortet.

Einleitung: Was ist Ihre Position in der Stadt Brig-Glis und im Rahmen von „AdJ“ (Alpenstadt des Jahres)?

Ich mache die Geschäftsführung für den Verein Alpenstadt Brig-Glis. Das ist so mein Bezug. Ich habe im ersten Moment, als ich die Fragen gesehen habe, gedacht, nein das sollte nicht ich beantworten, sondern jemand von der Stadtverwaltung selbst, aber da gab es kürzlich einen Wechsel. Wir haben dann gefunden, dass macht keinen Sinn, denn die wissen dann zum Teil auch nicht mehr als ich. Ich versuche jetzt das zu beantworten, ich habe aber auch mit dem vorhergegangenen Stelleninhaber dann Kontakt gehabt. Das ist dann der Teil A, den Sie auch gesehen haben, der dann eben schon ausgefüllt war.

Seit wann haben Sie mit dem Verein zu tun?

Wir haben 2018 ein Projekt gemacht, das war ähnlich wie jetzt Climate Action, eines dieser Projekte das AdJ macht, nämlich GaYA, *Governance and Youth in the Alps*. Da hat Brig-Glis schon mitgemacht und da habe ich die Projektleitung gemacht. Ich bin jetzt seit 2 Jahren Geschäftsführerin des Vereins Alpenstadt Brig-Glis.

B) Alpenstadt des Jahres

1) Welchen Input leistet Brig-Glis in dem Netzwerk?

Die Ausgangslage haben Sie ja dann im Punkt A schon mitbekommen. Es ging damals darum, dass man sich 2008 da gemeldet hat und engagiert hat. Es gab verschiedene Stufen, oder Vorläufe, die im Rahmen des Alpenstadt-Jubiläums 2007 dazu geführt haben, dass sich Brig-Glis dazu entschlossen hat, da mitmachen zu wollen. Die Alpentransversale ist etwas, Andreas Weissen ist erwähnt, der in der Alpeninitiative involviert war, und so war man dann eigentlich schon sehr sensibel was die Anliegen dieses Netzwerkes betrifft. Es gab Leute, die den Kontakt gepflegt haben, mit Villach und anderen Alpenstädten. So war dann klar, dass man da mitmacht. Seither war das dann so - ich würde sagen - ein bisschen ein auf und ab. Man hat sich für Projekte dann immer individuell entschieden, ob man mitmachen möchte oder nicht. Man hat dann 2018 dieses GaYa gemacht, wo man sich eingebracht hat mit spezifischen Fragestellungen die Brig-Glis betroffen haben, zur politischen Beteiligung von Brig-Glis. Man hat jetzt aktuell sich für das Climate Action Projekt entschieden. Nachdem die Schweiz aktuell den Vorsitz hat in der Alpenkonvention hat, dieses

Jahr, und letztes Jahr auch, wollte man da mitmachen. Natürlich mit den Vereinsversammlungen, Treffen, wo man immer wieder teilnimmt, wo man teilnimmt und sich immer wieder einbringt.

2) Welchen Output zieht Brig-Glis aus dem Netzwerk? Wofür wird das Netzwerk genutzt?

Als Output würde ich sagen sicherlich Austausch mit den anderen Alpenstädten, horizontal gesehen, wo man halt feststellt, dass Herausforderungen ähnlich sind, Erfahrungen, die man gemacht hat, auch ähnlicher Natur sind. Und da ist dann ein Austausch natürlich sehr wertvoll. Das können jetzt so projektspezifische Themen sein, wie jetzt eben Climate Action-Projekte, wo es konkret jetzt im Herbst ein Treffen geben wird, mit den Städten und Beobachterorganisationen, CIPRA und so weiter - die werden nach Brig-Glis kommen und da wird es dann einen Austausch geben – was hat man bis jetzt im Rahmen von Climate Action gemacht. Best-Practice, der Nutzen, Erfahrungsaustausch da natürlich, was man als Output herauszieht. Aber man ist auch in das Netzwerk eingebunden, wenn es um Fragen geht, die über die Projekte hinausgehen, da hat man einen kurzen Draht, oft natürlich auch personenbezogen. Es gibt da Verbindungen, die bestehen seit Jahren schon, wo man sich da austauschen und netzwerken kann.

Brig-Glis steht also in regem, regelmäßigem Austausch mit den anderen Mitgliedern und dem Netzwerk?

Ja, das würde ich so sagen. Ich glaube Brig-Glis gehört nicht zu den aktivsten Mitgliedern, wie jetzt zum Beispiel Sonthofen oder Idrija – klar, die sind ja auch im Vorstand – aber wir sind da so wahrscheinlich im Mittelfeld, wie man sich da einbringt und was man herausnimmt. Es gibt da andere Städte, es gibt eben eine weitere Schweizer Alpenstadt, Herisau, ich glaube die machen wenig bis gar nichts mehr. Was man auch sagen muss, dieses Alpenstadttjahr 2008, das hallt immer noch nach. Jedes Jahr stellt die Gemeinde ein Budget von 100.000 Franken zur Verfügung. Dieses Budget, das ist eben in dem Verein drinnen, den ich leite, dürfen wir dann einsetzen für Projekte im kulturellen Bereich, im ökologischen Bereich, wo es eben darum geht, im Sinn und Geist der Alpenstadt, der Alpenkonvention, etwas zu bewegen.

In den vorgelieferten Antworten wurde auch erwähnt, dass man ein klares Zeichen nach innen und aussen setzen wollte. Wird der Titel auch für Image- und Vermarktungszwecke genutzt? Ist in der Bevölkerung bekannt, dass man Alpenstadt des Jahres ist?

Das ist jetzt schwierig zu sagen. Brig-Glis ist in den letzten Jahren gewachsen, nochmal. 2008 war Alpenstadt des Jahres natürlich in aller Munde, das ist klar. Es ist vielleicht nicht auf breiter Ebene überall bekannt, aber es hat doch einen Namen, dass es viele wissen. Ich würde sagen die Mehrheit der Bevölkerung weiß das. Und so Projekte wie GaYa oder jetzt Climate Action, bieten dann die Möglichkeit, mit dem Label Alpenstadt des Jahres aufzutreten.

Wird Brig-Glis auch im Umfeld als Alpenstadt des Jahres wahrgenommen?

Wir unterstützen teilweise auch Projekte, die Wirkung haben, die über die Stadt hinausgeht. Ich glaube schon, dass die Agglomeration, umliegende Gemeinden, das auch wahrnehmen. Rein jetzt geographisch, also noch mehr in den Alpen als Stadt geht was gar nicht. Ich weiß nicht, ob sie das Rhone-Tal kennen, ob Sie da schon mal gewesen sind, Brig-Glis liegt da wirklich im Herzen der Alpen. Also diese Zuschreibung Alpenstadt, das passt. Es ist immer noch auf der Website präsent, es ist immer noch Teil, man tritt auch so auf. Diese Anlässe, die wir sponsern, das größte davon aktuell Bergbuch Brig (12.45), ein mehrtägiges Festival, auch da tritt man als Sponsor auf, also man ist schon in der Öffentlichkeit präsent, für ein interessiertes Publikum.

3) Welches sind Hindernisse / Herausforderungen beim „networken“?

Also Hindernisse sind vielleicht etwas sprachlicher Natur. Das macht es manchmal auch in diesen Veranstaltungen – obwohl auch wird dann Simultanübersetzung geboten wird – etwas hinderlich für jemanden, der nicht alle Sprachen spricht. Andere Hindernisse sind natürlich auch die Distanz, Verwaltungssysteme, politische Systeme, wie Abläufe funktionieren, wie Mitbestimmung gemacht wird. Aber das sind nicht Hindernisse für mich, das ist eine Herausforderung.

Wenn Distanz und Sprache ein Hindernis sind, würden Sie dann sagen, dass die Zusammenarbeit mit näherliegenden Städten stärker forciert wird?

Das sind einfach so generelle Herausforderungen, die Brig-Glis hat, die alle Städte haben. Wir haben keine andere Alpenstadt in unmittelbarer Nähe. Herisau ist auch recht weit weg. Die anderen, in Frankreich und Italien, sind etwas näher, aber da gibt es diese Barrieren in sprachlicher Art. Im Endeffekt glaube ich, dass man mit allen gleich gut, und gleich intensiv zusammenarbeitet, man findet immer Wege, sich da zu Verständigen.

4) Im Vergleich zu anderen Netzwerken, wo liegt der spezielle Mehrwert von „AdJ“?

Also ich glaube, der Vorteil von Alpenstadt des Jahres ist, dass es da ein funktionierendes Netzwerk gibt, auch sehr intensiv Projekte weiterverfolgt werden, jährlich neue Städte hinzukommen, die auch für neue Ideen sorgen. Ich würde das als sehr innovativ und offen bezeichnen, wo sich auch immer viel tut. Und das ist für Brig-Glis eben genau der Vorteil. Es ist kein geschlossenes Netzwerk, das ergibt sich ja, weil es jedes Jahr eine neue Alpenstadt gibt. Das ist sicherlich ein Mehrwert, vielleicht im Vergleich zu anderen Netzwerken, die dann irgendwo in sich geschlossen sind. Hier ist es eben im System schon so eingebunden, dass es immer neue Partner gibt.

Dann durchaus auch dieses Thema, das abgegrenzt ist, finde ich sehr gut. Der Schutz der Alpen, die Bewahrung einer Region, die sehr stark unter dem Bevölkerungsdruck auch leidet, Klimaveränderungen, die stattfinden. Da widmet man sich hochaktuellen Themen. Diese Dinge haben zwar Querschnittsmaterien, aber es ist ein Thema, es ist kein so breites Netzwerk, wo man sich dann auch darin verlieren kann. Es gibt ähnliche Netzwerke, die einen zu breiten Fokus haben, wo es wieder schwierig wird, auch konkrete Interessen zu verfolgen. Also ich finde diesen Fokus, einerseits, aber eben ein Thema, das sehr viele Querschnittsfunktionen und Schnittstellen hat, wo es dann wieder andere Partner braucht, sehr gut.

C) Brig-Glis

1) Im Jury-Entscheid von 2008 werden einerseits bestimmte Dinge gelobt, andererseits wird aber auch hervorgehoben, dass sich Brig-Glis in einer Umbruchphase befindet, befunden hat, in der man sich stärker der nachhaltigen Entwicklung und Kooperation mit dem Umland verschreiben will, in der, wie hier steht, alte Rivalitäten abgebaut werden sollen. Könnten in Brig-Glis durch die Verleihung des Titels 2008 neue Projekte oder Initiativen dahingehend angestoßen werden?

Also wir wiederholen uns jetzt hier ein bisschen, aber etwas Nachhaltiges ist natürlich dieser Verein, den es nach wie vor gibt und der jährlich mit 100.000 Franken dotiert ist, wo man dann Projekte im Sinn und Geist der Alpenstadt fördern kann. 100.000 Franken sind doch viel für die Region. Das würde ich auf jeden Fall als nachhaltig bezeichnen, denn ohne das wäre dieser Verein ja nicht gegründet worden. Es gab seither auch immer wieder kulturelle Anlässe, zum Beispiel mit den Alpenchören, wo man sich getroffen hat. Also auch das hilft mit, um diesen Austausch zu pflegen, auf kultureller Ebene. Das ist auch eine Initiative, die – würde ich sagen – es ohne die Alpenstadt des Jahres, den Titel 2008, nicht gegeben hätte. Die Verwaltung schmückt sich nach wie vor mit diesem Titel. Es ist eine Identität gestiftet worden, die man auch gerne herzeigt, eine Kultur, die in der Stadtverwaltung Eingang gefunden hat.

Angesprochen wurde im damaligen Juryentscheid ja auch der Aspekt der Kooperation mit dem Umland, Stichwort alte Rivalitäten begraben. Ist das auch etwas, was der Verein Alpenstadt Brig-Glis leisten konnte oder kann?

Das glaube ich jetzt nicht. In dem Verein Alpenstadt Brig-Glis war früher auch die Nachbargemeinde Naters mit dabei, aber die sind dann irgendwann ausgestiegen – 2012, 2013 glaube ich. Ich glaube zu diesem Punkt, Rivalitäten, da gibt es andere Gefäße, aber nicht Alpenstadt, die man nutzt, um hier den Rang zu finden und zusammenzuarbeiten.

2) Was sind spezifische Problemstellungen bezüglich nachhaltiger Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung in Brig-Glis? Inwieweit kann das Netzwerk „AdJ“ die Stadt dabei unterstützen?

Also das beste Beispiel ist aktuell das Climate Action Projekt, wo es eben um nachhaltige Stadtentwicklung geht, also wie man Wasser wieder in das Zentrum der Stadt bringen kann. Wasser ist attraktiv für die Bevölkerung, ist attraktiv für den Tourismus, angenehmer Effekt zur Kühlung im Sommer. Wasser gehört schon immer dazu zur Region, zur Stadt, nur hat man in den letzten Jahrzehnten dieses Wasser sukzessive unterirdisch in Kanäle verbannt und nicht mehr oberirdisch geführt. Da erhofft sich die Gemeinde, dass man mit dem Projekt Climate Action etwas beitragen kann zur nachhaltigen Stadtentwicklung. Ohne dieses Projekt würde es das nicht geben.

3) Sie haben ja schon erklärt, dass Brig-Glis in der Vergangenheit an Projekten wie GaYA oder Climate Action teilgenommen hat. In der Zukunft, welche Art von Projekten bzw. welche Themen würde man sich für zukünftige Projekte wünschen?

Also da braucht es immer Anknüpfungspunkte, dass man sagt, da ist Handlungsbedarf und da kommt jetzt extern eine Initiative, wo man profitieren kann, weil lokales Know-How aufgebaut wird. Man hat dann im Verein auch verschiedene Betreuungspersonen, die coachen helfen, die sonst unterstützen können. Es werden auch, kleine finanzielle Beiträge, unter Umständen, geleistet. Ich glaube, dass es auch in der Zukunft so sein wird, dass sich Brig-Glis an solchen Maßnahmen beteiligt, weil Herausforderungen für die Alpenstädte ähnlich sind. Wenn Projekte lanciert werden, vom Vorstand oder von anderer Seite, von anderen Alpenstädten, dass das dann immer auf offene Türen bei Brig-Glis treffen wird.

Könnten Sie sich vorstellen, das Brig-Glis in Zukunft auch selbst Projekte im Alpenstadt-Kontext initiieren könnte?

Das kann ich mir schon vorstellen, auch wenn es in der Vergangenheit bisher nicht so gewesen ist. Jetzt hat es gerade Wechsel gegeben, und dann hat man sowieso genug andere Themen im Alltag, da ist das letzte was man macht, glaube ich, da noch etwas einzubringen. Aber das kann schon wieder kommen. Der Vorstand, der Verein selbst hat ja auch immer die Möglichkeit, bei den Mitgliedern nachzufragen, ich meine, dafür gibt es ja die Versammlungen, die Generalversammlung und ich erlebe das so – ich war an einigen dabei – dass das sehr aktiv ist. Es ist ja kein geschlossener – oder zumindest nur bedingt geschlossener Verein. Ich habe das immer sehr intensiv erlebt. Da wird diese Diskussion auch immer aktiv angestoßen, bringt eure Themen ein, bringt eure Projekte ein. Ich könnte jetzt nicht sagen, was der Vorstand, oder der Verein allgemein, da jetzt so viel anders machen müssten. Man geht ja auch immer zu den Vereinen – gut jetzt in den letzten zwei Jahren war das natürlich nicht so möglich – aber man hat jetzt andere Möglichkeiten zur Partizipation – also ich würde sagen, da werden wir jetzt als Brig-Glis genug abgeholt, um sich da einbringen zu können.

D) Ausblick

1) Wem / Welcher Art von Stadt würden Sie empfehlen dem Netzwerk beizutreten?

Das Thema ist ja gesetzt, es müssen Städte in den Alpen sein. Es muss wirklich dieser Bezug zu den Alpen, mit den spezifischen Herausforderungen, eben Wachstum, wie kann man das stemmen, touristische Attraktivität, mit den klimatechnischen Herausforderungen, diese Trockenheit teilweise in den Städte, das sind Schwierigkeiten, die für alle ziemlich gleich gelten.

... also eigentlich alle Städte in den Alpen?

Ja, vielleicht, zumindest mit einer gewissen Größe. Was ich auch gut finde, ist, dass alle Länder vertreten sind. Im Moment sind wir in der Schweiz nicht gut aufgestellt, mit nur zwei Städten, ich finde das schade, weil die Schweiz so ein zentraler Teil der Alpen ist. Daher würde ich mir schon auch eine Schweizer Alpenstadt wünschen, Chur zum Beispiel oder Thun.

Das steht zwar nicht im Fragebogen, würde mich aber persönlich interessieren – warum glauben Sie ist die Schweiz so schwach vertreten?

Einerseits gibt es dieses Gesetz der Masse, da wo welche sind, da kommen dann neue dazu, dann spricht man darüber, das ist die eine Geschichte. Die andere Geschichte ist vielleicht, dass man in der Schweiz sonst recht gut vernetzt ist, über andere Netzwerke, kann ich mir vorstellen, es gibt viele Beobachterorganisationen, CIPRA zum Beispiel, sind sehr nah in der Schweiz, oder sind in der Schweiz stark tätig. Da sagt man sich vielleicht – ist nur eine Vermutung von mir – ich bin ja da schon gut eingebunden und vernetzt.

Glauben Sie, dass die Städte den Verein aber kennen?

Also ich habe jetzt zwei Städte genannt, Chur und Thun, wo ich glaube, dass das schon einmal ein Thema war, das dort auch in den Stadträten diskutiert worden ist. Aber dieser Entscheid steht und fällt mit Einzelpersonen, wenn dann eine neue Legislatur ist, es neue Verantwortung gibt. Da könnte die Leitung, der Vorstand von Alpenstädte auch schauen, wo haben wir noch weiße Flecken auf der Landkarte, und auch die Mal anfragen. Im Moment sind Frankreich und Italien sehr aktiv, ich glaube, Österreich ist jetzt auch nicht gerade stark vertreten ...

... ja, allerdings...

... und Deutschland, da sind halt viele Städte für mich eher außerhalb des Perimeters, da kommt man dann wieder mit anderen Themen, wo ich finde, da verliert man dann ein bisschen den Fokus. Da zieht man dann andere Themen hinzu, die für Städte in den Alpen dann doch nicht so Thema sind.

2) (zur Zukunft des Netzwerkes „AdJ“)

Damit habe ich, glaube ich, auch schon recht viel gesagt über die Zukunft des Netzwerkes. Ich habe es immer mit einer gewissen Distanz gesehen, erlebt. Ich habe es immer als recht aktiv wahrgenommen, es sind gute Leute, die wollen auch etwas bewegen, setzen sich für dieses Netzwerk ein, das ist gut. Mir gefällt dieser Fokus, den muss man beibehalten, nicht verwässern, und die Tatsache das man offen ist, das jedes Jahr eine neue Alpenstadt hinzukommt, hilft, dass man nicht so ein Kreis aus eingeschworenen Mitgliedern wird, wo nicht mehr durchlässig sind. Dann hat das Netzwerk auf jeden eine Berechtigung in der Zukunft. Es gab ja auch wenige Austritte, also ich glaube zwei Drittel aller Städte, die den Titel hatten, sind immer noch im Verein dabei, und das sagt auch etwas aus.

Interview 8: AtY

05.07.2022

Die Fragen wurden via Email schriftlich beantwortet

Magdalena **HOLZER** ist Geschäftsführerin des Vereins Alpenstadt des Jahres.

A) Kurzfragen

1) Nicht jede Alpenstadt des Jahres ist auch Mitglied des Vereins. Wie viele / Welche Städte sind aktuell Mitglieder im Verein?

Aktuell hat der Verein 19 Mitglieder, bei der nächsten Mitgliederversammlung wird auch Sondrio, die Alpenstadt des Jahres 2007, wieder als Mitglied aufgenommen. Sie sind ausgetreten zwischenzeitlich.

3) Wie viele der Mitglieder würdest du als „aktiv“ bezeichnen?

Etwa die Hälfte der 19 Mitglieder sind aktiv im Verein beteiligt, nehmen an den Veranstaltungen teil, sind Partner in unseren Projekten etc.. Wir möchten versuchen, auch die anderen Mitglieder, die sich in den letzten Jahren weniger eingebracht haben, wieder mehr ins Boot zu holen. In den Städten ist dies immer sehr abhängig von den Personen. Nach jeder Wahl des Bürgermeisters oder der Stadtvertretung kann sich personell vieles ändern, und je nachdem wo die Interessen liegen, sind die Vertreter:innen mehr oder weniger aktiv im Verein.

Die Umsetzung von Projekten ist hier eine gute Möglichkeit für uns, mit allen unseren Mitgliedern in Kontakt zu treten und eine aktive Betreuung sicherzustellen. Sonst stehen uns für eine konstante Betreuung nur sehr begrenzt Mittel zur Verfügung,

4) Ist der Mitgliedsbeitrag für alle Städte, unabhängig der Größe, gleich?

Ja, der jährliche Mitgliedsbeitrag beträgt für alle 5000 Euro.

5) Zu den Bewerbungen: Wie viele Städte bewerben sich in etwa? Werden auch Städte abgelehnt?

Es kommt mittlerweile eher selten vor, dass sich Städte eigeninitiativ bei uns bewerben. Es ist vielmehr so, dass wir auf Vertreter:innen von Städten zugehen, von denen wir wissen, dass bereits eine gewissen Affinität zu unseren Vereinszielen besteht, dass die Städte an der nachhaltigen Entwicklung interessiert sind und auch bereit für einen internationalen Austausch in diesem Netzwerk. Von den Jurymitgliedern oder auch von Vertreter:innen anderer Alpenstädte kommen oft Hinweise oder bereits Kontakte zu möglichen Kandidaten für den Titel.

Dass eine Stadt, die sich beworben hat, abgelehnt wurde, kam bisher noch nicht vor. Es gab natürlich von Seiten der Jury in manchen Fällen Verbesserungsvorschläge. Auch gab es Städte, die erst mal Fördermitglied wurden, um sich den Verein und seine Aktivitäten genauer anzuschauen.

Insgesamt gibt es nicht viele Städte im Alpenraum, in Deutschland etwa ist der Pool sozusagen schon fast erschöpft. Oder in Vorarlberg ist es beispielsweise so, dass eine Stadt bereits den Namen „Alpenstadt“ für touristische Zwecke nutzt, das macht es für die andere Städte der Region weniger attraktiv, den Titel „Alpenstadt des Jahres“ für sich zu beanspruchen.

5) Von anderen Gesprächspartnern habe ich erfahren, dass die Einschränkung, dass eine Alpenstadt des Jahres auch eine „Stadt“ sein muss, aufgehoben werden soll. Ist das so richtig? Gibt es also keine Einschränkung bezüglich der Größe des Ortes mehr?

Doch, diese Einschränkung werden wir beibehalten. Es gibt bereits Netzwerke auf Gemeindeebene, mit denen wir nah zusammenarbeiten. Hier möchten wir auch keine Konkurrenz darstellen und für kleinere Gemeinden ist es auch weniger attraktiv in diesem Städtenetzwerk. Aber es gibt Überlegungen, den Titel etwas aufzubrechen oder neu zu framen. Evt. eine Titelvergabe nur alle zwei Jahre zu machen, oder die Vergabe des Titel an einen Städteverbund oder Gemeindeverbund, von denen es auch immer mehr gibt.

Evt. auch Alpenstädten den Titel nach einer gewissen Zeit wie 5 oder 10 Jahre erneut zu verleihen, quasi als Bestätigung für ihren Weg. Gelegentlich gibt es nämlich auch Mitglieder, die Maßnahmen setzen, die nicht besonders nachhaltig sind, auch hier gibt es dann Diskussionen, wie wir mit solchen Fällen umgehen.

B) Alpenstadt des Jahres

1) Was sind die Gründe, warum Städte dem Netzwerk beitreten?

Es gibt mindestens 10 gute Gründe für eine Stadt, sich für den Titel zu bewerben:

1. Bestätigung für Geleistetes

Der Titel ist nicht nur eine Bestätigung für die bisherigen Leistungen, sondern auch ein Ansporn, weiterzuführen, was gut war. Er würdigt die vorangegangenen Entscheidungen des Stadtrats und der Bürgermeisterin bzw. des Bürgermeisters.

2. Hilfreiche Kontakte

Die Mitgliedschaft im Verein schafft direkte Kontakte im Netzwerk. An den Sitzungen nehmen politische Entscheidungsträger:innen und Mitarbeiter:innen der Verwaltung teil. Der Austausch mit anderen Alpenstädten des Jahres ist informell, unkompliziert und mit geringem Aufwand verbunden.

3. Innovative Projektschmiede

Mitglieder können an innovativen Projekten des Vereins teilnehmen und eigene Ideen einbringen. Sie profitieren so vom internationalen Austausch sowie einer Teilfinanzierung. Die Projekte schaffen zudem einen konkreten Mehrwert für die Stadt und ihre Bürger:innen.

4. Internationale Partnerbörse

Für europäische bzw. internationale Projekte sind oft Partner:innen aus verschiedenen Ländern notwendig. Die internationale Ausrichtung des Vereins ermöglicht Partnerschaften innerhalb des Netzwerks und Zugang zu hilfreichen Informationen.

5. Alpenweite Kompetenz

Der Verein ist als Netzwerk mit eigener Geschäftsstelle organisiert, in der die Fäden zusammenlaufen. Sie bietet den Mitgliedern fachliche und organisatorische Unterstützung in deren jeweiliger Sprache und gibt Informationen länderspezifisch weiter. Da die Geschäftsstelle des Vereins von der Internationalen Alpenschutzkommission CIPRA betreut wird, erhalten alle Alpenstädte des Jahres direkten Zugang zum Fachwissen und den Kontakten dieser erfahrenen, alpenweit tätigen NGO.

6. Grenzüberschreitende Kommunikation

Die Geschäftsstelle des Vereins sorgt für die internationale, mehrsprachige Öffentlichkeitsarbeit. So wird die Stadt über die eigenen Landesgrenzen hinaus bekannt, nicht nur als Reiseziel, sondern auch als Ort, wo innovative Projekte umgesetzt werden.

7. Internationale Strahlkraft

Die internationale Auszeichnung ist sehr positiv besetzt. Sie signalisiert, dass die Stadt Herausforderungen der nachhaltigen Entwicklung anpackt. Der Titel kann somit für das Standortmarketing genutzt werden.

8. Neue Impulse für die Politik

Der Verein lebt und pflegt einen regen Austausch mit Gleichgesinnten über sprachliche und geografische Grenzen hinweg. Die Zusammenarbeit mit anderen Städten aus dem Alpenraum gibt wertvolle Impulse für die eigene Politik.

9. Vertretung auf transnationaler Ebene

Der Verein ist als einziges Städtenetzwerk offizieller Beobachter der Alpenkonvention. Ein:e Vertreter:in des Vereins nimmt somit an den Sitzungen der Minister:innen der Alpenstaaten (Alpenkonferenz) teil und kann damit Einfluss auf die politischen Entscheidungen in den Alpen nehmen. So ist es für die einzelnen Mitglieder einfacher, im eigenen Land die übergeordnete Ebene wie beispielsweise Umweltministerien zu erreichen.

10. Flexibilität & Kontinuität

Jede Stadt kann sich in den Verein Alpenstadt des Jahres nach ihren Möglichkeiten und Bedürfnissen einbringen. Das Netzwerk lebt von der aktiven Teilnahme seiner Mitglieder, d. h. Städte, die viel in die Zusammenarbeit mit den anderen Mitgliedern investieren, profitieren mehr als Städte, deren Möglichkeiten oder Bedürfnisse zeitweilig begrenzt sind. Alle Städte entrichten gegenwärtig einen jährlichen Mitgliedsbeitrag von 5'000 €.

2) Welche sind die Dinge, für die das Netzwerk aus deiner / eurer Sicht am meisten genutzt wird?

Die Projektpartnerbörse ist sicherlich etwas, wovon die Städte sehr profitieren. Diese Zusammenarbeit in gemeinsamen Projekten und der internationale Austausch, der auch als Inspiration für Aktivitäten wirkt. Wir haben beispielsweise ein Webinar zum Thema Luftqualität veranstaltet. Das, was hier Passy und Chamonix in diesem Bereich machen, soll nun auch in Biella umgesetzt werden. Das Spannende ist, dass hier politische Ausrichtungen keinerlei Rolle spielen, es geht um das Gemeinsame, um den Austausch und das Voneinander Lernen.

3) Welches sind Hindernisse / Herausforderungen beim „networken“?

Der Verein ist ein guter Netzwerker und Vermittler, das ist auch der große Mehrwert. Was allerdings fehlt und somit oft ein Hindernis bzw. eine Herausforderung darstellt, ist die Zeit. Die Vertreter:innen der Städte machen ihre Vereinsarbeit teilweise in ihrer Freizeit, da es von den Gemeinden oft nicht bzw. nicht alles bezahlt wird, etwa die langen Reisezeiten in den Alpenländern. Diese Zeit müssen sie oft abzwacken von den sonstigen Aufgaben, die sie haben. Es braucht hier großes, persönliches Engagement der Personen und auch seitens der Bürgermeister, die Leute dafür freizustellen.

Wir wünschen uns, dass von den Städten hier mehr Zeit zur Verfügung gestellt werden sollte für internationale Zusammenarbeit, von der sie mit Sicherheit profitieren.

4) Im Vergleich zu anderen Netzwerken, wo liegt der spezielle Mehrwert von „AdJ“?

Städte in den Alpen stehen oft vor ähnlichen Herausforderungen, egal ob das nun eine Kommune in Slowenien oder in Frankreich ist. Die Probleme sind oft dieselben – etwa im Bereich Klimawandel, Tourismus, oder in Sachen Demographie. Der Verein bietet den Vorteil, dass Städte gemeinsam an diesen Herausforderungen arbeiten können, zusammen Ideen schmieden, Projekte entwickeln und sich aktiv dazu austauschen. Unser Anspruch ist es, dass ein Vertrauensverhältnis entsteht unter den Mitgliedern. Oft lässt es sich mit Personen aus derselben Region weniger gut sprechen wie mit Leuten aus anderen Ländern, die diese Probleme nicht so kennen aber vor ähnlichen Herausforderungen stehen. Darum ist uns ein offener Umgang wichtig.

Der Alpenperimeter ist ebenfalls wichtig für uns, weil wir damit die kleinen Städte in den Alpen ansprechen. Diese erfüllen nämlich wichtige Funktionen im Zusammenleben. Sie sind funktionale Zentren, sie bieten dem ländlichen Umland wichtige Dienstleistungen, Schulsysteme, Infrastruktur, und nehmen eine wichtige Rolle ein. Ein achtsamer Umgang mit diesem Umland ist daher eines der fünf Vereinsziele. Wenn man über den Eusalp-Perimeter spricht, sind auch Metropolen dabei. Hier ist der Ressourcenverbrauch aber ganz ein anderer und auch der Umgang und die Nähe zum Berggebiet ist weniger stark als bei den Städten im Alpenperimeter stärker.

5) Inwieweit passiert Zusammenarbeit mit anderen alpinen Netzwerken?

Die Alpenkonvention und ihr Ständiges Sekretariat ist einer unserer wichtigsten Partner, mit dem wir einen sehr guten Austausch pflegen. Wir sind auch bei den Sitzungen der Alpenkonvention vertreten. Mit dem Gemeindeforum „Allianz in den Alpen“ besteht ebenfalls eine enge Zusammenarbeit, hier läuft aktuell wieder eine Projektentwicklung für die laufende Alpine-Space-Periode. Mit CIPRA ist natürlich bereits strukturell eine Nähe gegeben, auch hier funktioniert der Austausch bestens und der Verein agiert komplett eigenständig.

C) Projekte

1) Welche Art von Projekten will der Verein in Zukunft stärker forcieren?

Projekte, die in Zusammenarbeit mit kleinen Gemeinden und Städten im Alpenraum stattfinden. Sowie Projekte zum Brennpunkt „Klimakrise“ im Zusammenhang mit Flächenverbrauch.

2) Gibt es Themengebiete, die der Verein in Zukunft besonders forcieren möchte?

Wichtige Themengebiete, auf die wir unseren Fokus legen, sind Luftqualität, Besucherlenkung/Tourismus sowie Jugendpartizipation.

3) Welche Strategien gibt es, um eher „inaktive“ Mitglieder stärker einzubinden?

Wie so oft ist der persönliche Kontakt und Austausch die erfolgsversprechendste Strategie. Da das Engagement für den Verein sehr abhängig von den Personen ist und es in einer Stadt oft an 2-3 Leuten hängt, denen eventuell die Zeit oder das Interesse fehlt, ist es hier wichtig, diese persönlich vom Mehrwert und den Vorteilen der Mitgliedschaft zu überzeugen.

D) Ausblick

1) Wem / Welcher Art von Stadt würdest du empfehlen dem Netzwerk beizutreten?

Wir heißen Städte und Kommunen willkommen, die sich für eine grünere, zukunftstaugliche, nachhaltige Zukunft einsetzen. Mit Stadtvertreter:innen, die nicht nur ans Heute denken, sondern auch ans Morgen und die Bevölkerung in ihre Entscheidungen miteinbeziehen. Natürlich sollte der Stadt auch daran liegen, über den eigenen Kirchturm zu schauen – im wahrsten Sinne. Der Wunsch, sich in einem transnationalen Umfeld auszutauschen ist von Vorteil.

2) Wo siehst du die Zukunft des Netzwerkes „AdJ“?

Wir sehen eine Chance darin, noch mehr Projekte umzusetzen und so die Qualität der Zusammenarbeit innerhalb des Vereins zu stärken und weitere Kontakte zu knüpfen. Dadurch gibt es mehr aktive Mitglieder, die sich einbringen und in ihrer Stadt wichtige Maßnahmen und Aktivitäten umsetzen können.

Wir möchten in Zukunft vermehrt digitale Tools nutzen für thematische oder auch regionale Treffen von Städten, die sich bei bestimmten Themen mehr einbringen wollen.