



Alpine soils are valuable to all of us!?



How water, peatlands and inner development are interconnected parts of our alpine soils. Press release

The European project Impuls4Action had its final conference held online on the 20th of May with participants from the whole alpine area.

After a welcome by Landesrätin Hochgruber Kuenzer of spatial development in South Tyrol, who thanks the people who are lobbying for our alpine landscapes and soils, the key speaker Prof. Lučka Kajfež Bogataj from the University of Ljubljana stressed out that land and soil is under pressure in the Alps and this leads to reduced land for farming and wildlife thus reducing food production and biodiversity. With the ongoing climate change water scarcity will affect all of us and even more future generations. That's why it is important to include stakeholders from different fields, including youth representatives, to act locally on the interconnected topics. Less rainfall but at the same time more extreme weather and drainage of peatlands lead already now to water shortage and more floods and land erosion, thus affecting more and more agriculture, food production and also infrastructures. On the other hand, the consumption of land influences not only the economy but also the quality of life. The reuse of developed land remains low at only 13% and soil degradation is not well monitored. She pointed out: *“As an impulse for action to decision makers a holistic approach is needed, because the topics are interlinked. Thus, instead of tackling them separately, we must strive for common solutions. Therefore, binding targets are needed, investments in land recycling and the setting up of connected green infrastructures.”*

All these issues must also be considered against the backdrop of climate change and the EU Green Deal. The conservation and rewetting of peatlands plays an important role in this context in order to bind CO² and ultimately protect our climate. This also benefits agriculture, the economy and the population. Climate change increases the need for integrative activities and tailor-made instruments for soil protection and the development of blue and green infrastructures. In light of this, Impuls4action aims to initiate measures to support our alpine soils and a sustainable development by providing appropriate instruments, raising awareness and finding new models for soil protection in the Alps. The project deals with 3 topics: 1. water management, 2. inner development and 3. peatlands, which all have an impact on alpine soils. Starting from diverse local workshops with stakeholders, scenarios for all topics were developed with stakeholders of pilot regions to consider possible future developments. This is used as a basis to decide for desirable future developments and to take actions which support this direction and avoid undesirable developments.

To provide practical help, usable also after the end of the project the toolbox “Less Land Take” was developed. The toolbox provides relevant data, best practices, expert contacts, methods and templates online: www.impuls4action.eu about the 3 topics to interested and concerned parties at local and regional level in the EUSALP area. The toolbox is meant to trigger local and regional action on Alpine Region's specific issues in line with the EUSALP declaration on “Sustainable land use and soil protection”.

In addition to this another strategic initiative of the alpine area was presented “smart villages”, municipalities who use the newest technologies to improve the quality of life, local circuits and other services like mobility to local citizens. Also, as a result from the Alpine Space project ADO (Alpine drought Observatory) the online drought observatory platform was presented starting from data that in the Southern and Eastern Alps precipitation are strongly reduced especially in spring. Responsible for an entertaining break, Ania Viero presented her Poetry Slam about the topics. In the discussion representatives of economy, society, environment, experts and youth representatives debated about steps toward a more sustainable land and soil use in the EUSALP perimeter. The youth representatives, especially young farmers witness climate change every day, they realize that awareness-raising is crucial to speed up the change of mindsets. To achieve a better future, it is necessary to incentivize them with subsidies for sustainable agriculture, with a focus on new technologies. Sustainable development does not only mean protecting the environment but also a smart way to live. This is why inner development has a key role to not only protect land consumption but to be aligned with the needs of the younger generation - i.e., digital infrastructure and green mobility - which would ensure economical and environmentally friendly growth. First steps are undertaken; however, it is not enough to have ambitious goals, more concrete implementation actions are needed and the exchange between diverse stakeholders should be intensified. Less land take offers also new opportunities including economy (e.g. restoration). To achieve a critical mass it's time to act now to value our alpine soils!

Project consortium:



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