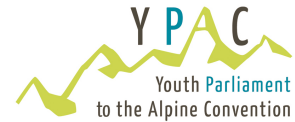




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C2 – Quality of life

Alpine Plan – Same Region, Same Rules

The Alps are known and loved for their unique combination between nature and human activities. However, this extraordinary place is threatened by human greed. The expansion of tourist infrastructure affects the Alpine environment drastically, without limitations. However, Bavaria has implemented a legal framework in order to deal with these challenges. The “Alpenplan” divides the Bavarian Alps into three zones with different restrictions. The classification criteria are the degree of human intervention, the existence of natural hazards, and the ecological relevance of the area. The zones are the following: Zone A, the development zone, where it is largely permitted to build new infrastructure, resulting in economic advantages which increase the quality of life. In Zone C, on the contrary, infrastructural development is completely forbidden, except when measures are taken to protect the environment, or in some special cases such as protection against avalanches. In this zone nature and humans will both benefit from having a quiet space. This has an enormous positive impact on the quality of life due to nature conservation. Finally, Zone B serves as a transition zone in which construction is only permitted with special authorization.

It is necessary to establish this regulation in all Alpine countries to share common legal principles. The positive impacts on nature and the quality of life are proven by several studies, which have shown that visitors to Bavaria are attracted by the pristine environment of the Alps, especially by the positive effects the “Alpenplan” has on the environment, on nature, and on us human beings.

In conclusion, it is sensible to implement this initiative in all Alpine countries, so that all of them can benefit from this framework. The implementation should be accomplished by the national Ministries for the Environment and promoted and adopted by the Alpine Convention. Furthermore, these institutions should also be responsible for drafting laws and regulations, as well as for the management of these three zones with their defined criteria.

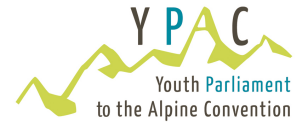
Quality over Quantity – a new way of managing mass tourism

Mass tourism poses a significant challenge in the Alps, particularly within protected areas, where it contributes to issues such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, and traffic congestion. Therefore, the quality of life for local communities in protected areas is very restricted.

To solve these problems, we postulate the establishment of visitor centres, including entry tickets specifically designed for the access to protected natural areas. This approach aims to regulate the number of tourists effectively while ensuring all of them the opportunity to appreciate the natural beauty of the Alps. Furthermore, the promotion of public transport is crucial to alleviate the problem of traffic congestion and foster a more peaceful, less polluted environment for both, local residents and wildlife. The supply of entry tickets would be limited in quantity, with the exact number determined seasonally and in consideration for the conservation needs of flora and fauna. This decision-making process would be overseen by the regional tourist association and the local Environmental Department, who would also identify the areas where the programme should be implemented. Tickets can be acquired online in advance or at the visitor centre on the day of the visit. These centres would provide services and well-trained guides, which would enhance the overall experience.



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Rangers stationed throughout the protected areas would check authorization and respectful behaviour among both tourists and residents. Residents, identified through a designated „local ID“, would have free access. Additionally, the establishment of visitor centres would create year-round employment opportunities for local residents, therefore supporting the local economy.

In conclusion, the implementation of visitor centres with limited access tickets offers a realistic solution to mitigate the impacts of mass tourism in the Alps, while simultaneously fostering economic growth and the creation of jobs for locals.

Magical Retirement: Establishing Retirement Homes & New Jobs

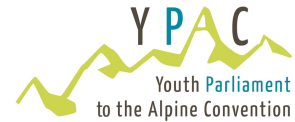
Currently we are facing the problem of an ageing society, especially in the areas within or near protected areas of the Alps. Emigration of youth caused by the lack of economic activities and employment opportunities is a common problem. Quality of life consists of different components such as healthy living space, good health care, infrastructure and services, income and jobs and housing conditions.

We propose to use already existing infrastructure to create retirement homes. The quality of life of the elderly people would be improved directly by locating the facilities in the protected natural areas. Science suggests that spending time in these areas positively affects health. It would also improve infrastructure and facilities. While there are already retirement homes in more populated areas, some may choose our proposed option if they appreciate spending their time in less populated areas. In the end, it is still a choice. Retirement homes create many jobs and a demand for workers. These workers could be either locals or immigrants depending on the needs. Nevertheless, subventions could encourage workers to move into these regions. According to legislation, there would be a sufficient number of medical personnel. Additionally, by building retirement homes we attract investors to renew health care, telecommunication, facilities, shops, etc. Furthermore, we also create new opportunities for local manufacturers and service providers. We also propose visits of students from schools nearby the protected areas to the retirement homes. This creates opportunities for intergenerational exchange, which prevents loneliness. Students would get to know the job opportunities in these institutions. As a result, they interact with each other and the locals. This would be organized by local schools.

The responsibility for implementation of our proposal would lie on governments and local governments in cooperation with departments of social work, health, tourism and environment. It would work based on a system of commissions. With the implementation of this postulation, we would achieve quality of life for elders, who represent an important part of the population, while also including benefits for the young generations.



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C4 – Cultural heritage

8 countries, 1 label

We are proposing a label that promotes locally-produced and marketed products from protected natural areas. It is our goal to unite all Alpine regions under one label. Therefore, we would not only support the culturally rich environment of the Alps, but also help farmers located in protected areas.

The government would play a role in promoting the products and the label. While the core criteria should remain consistent across all countries, national governments could introduce additional aspects which they consider important for them. Products by farmers in protected natural areas differ from other products in various aspects. Since there are many regulations concerning agriculture in these regions, farmers are encouraged to adopt a traditional and sustainable way of production. Consequently, the resulting goods will be more environmentally friendly and will contribute positively to efforts to fight climate change. Farmers in protected areas use traditional cultivation methods, which make their work more time-consuming and challenging. Consequently, their products will be more expensive, but because all of the positive aspects of the production which are stated above, the price justifies itself. Traditionally produced local food has been present throughout history and is a reflection of the tradition. Preserving these traditions is crucial for maintaining our cultural identity. In the past labels have been proven to be effective in increasing sales, which not only leads to a higher income but also results in better health for people, thanks to the food being produced organically.

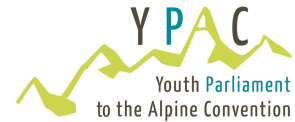
C3 – Climate change

Climate Consciousness in the Alps: Empowering Young Minds

Temperatures in the Alpine area rise twice as fast as the global average due to climate change, resulting in dramatic consequences on protected areas. Currently, media coverage of climate activism tends to focus on extreme forms that fail to resonate with the public and undermine previously effective initiatives. Our educational project will reinstate the importance of this topic as a priority among young people and educate them about protected natural areas on both national and international level. Increased awareness leads to a change in mindset and behaviour. To have a bigger appeal to the students, we will implement this as a recurring educational school trip as a mandatory component of the curriculum. At primary school level the project will include daily excursions and workshops in a local protected area, for early confrontation with the topic. Doing this in a familiar environment explains climate change to children as a real, regional problem. In middle school pupils will travel to a neighbouring country in the Alpine region, to learn first-hand that climate change is a global problem. The projects, workshops with experts, local work and guided tours envisaged by the programme will enhance their sensibility about protected areas. Through sustainable activities, we additionally promote alternative concepts for tourism, such as mountaineering villages and emission-free winter sports. The Alpine Convention and each member country's educational departments will directly collaborate in the development and implementation of this programme. It is an easy and effective long-term solution which encourages communication, activism and change.



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C1 – Biodiversity

Edustations

Currently, most visitors and inhabitants of protected natural areas do not have enough knowledge about the biodiversity that surrounds them. Oftentimes, many people aren't even aware that they have entered a protected area and must respect the rules that apply there. This lack of awareness leads to unintentional harm caused to native plants and biodiversity, both vital components in upholding Alpine landscapes and ecosystems. For example, improper waste disposal on hiking trails can lead to forest fires, water pollution, and harm to protected animals.

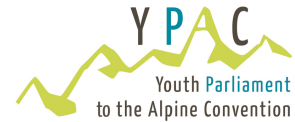
To address this challenge, our proposed resolution is to implement interactive and educational hiking trails called "Edustations" within protected natural areas to raise public awareness about regional biodiversity. For instance, some of the interactive tasks could include learning how to identify endemic species and understanding the rules and regulations in protected areas. This will be achieved by placing multiple information boards along the trail and providing stamps that participants can collect and trade for small prizes to motivate them to complete the trail. We would also create an Edustation website where visitors can take a quiz on the topic. With this website, we aim to establish an extensive information portal that connects nature parks throughout Europe, reinforcing the sense of community among Alpine countries and strengthening the bonds between European protected areas. Regional NGOs can oversee the maintenance of the Edustation trails and offer guided tours along the paths upon request for larger groups, such as school classes or tourists. Through the implementation of Edustations, we can reduce the danger of harming the environment that littering poses to nature parks, create a local community that supports biodiversity, and provide the public with a vast number of resources to further educate themselves on this topic.

Habitats beyond borders

One of the main concerns related to protected natural areas is the fragmentation of habitats that do not get fully included in the designated protected area, resulting in a loss and hazard to the biodiversity. With the presented measures, we intend to protect the whole habitat, going beyond and across protected areas and national borders. This can be achieved using ecological corridors. Firstly, local authorities should try to cooperate with private landowners to determine areas that are more at risk or whose biodiversity extends outside the protected area. To ensure the thriving and preservation of the natural life cycle and of biodiversity, ecological corridors should be implemented. Corridors are a type of lower-level protected areas that act as a pathway and connection, including the whole habitat. For example, they follow waterbodies, mountain ranges and, in general, areas that have the same habitat. For this reason, even if a river, for example, is not included in its entirety in the protected area or if it crosses national borders, we should preserve it equally. Rules at the discretion of the local authorities should apply to the corridors. To deal with the possibility of industries, companies and farmers whose land would be included in these corridors, we suggest educating and informing the people through workshops and events. If needed, offering funding and subsidies over time as well. In conclusion, it's the responsibility of the local authorities to implement the measures and strive for a better-connected environment that ensures biodiversity is preserved in its entirety, including the whole habitat. Additionally, it's important to cooperate with NGOs to raise awareness about these topics and have a broader view that goes beyond borders.



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Invasive (f)laws: The Human Aspect

Invasive species are responsible for interrupting biodiversity's natural processes, thus causing irreparable damage. If they are not combated at an early stage, they displace native species and make it basically impossible to get rid of the invasive species. We must consider the difference between the natural and the human aspect of causes for the spread of invasive species. Firstly, it's important to understand that the natural aspect is almost impossible to eradicate and extremely difficult to contain. The human aspect is easier to control. Our idea is to implement different preventive measures, which are developed by independent experts and forest rangers. What sets our measures apart from already existing projects is that we would focus on smaller yet busier parts of the protected areas so that they would be thoroughly controlled. The officials in charge would supervise specific groups of people inside the protected area, for example, local fishermen, birdwatchers, hunters, and so on. These measures could open the opportunity for hunters to join newly created local associations which monitor hunting activities. Having forest rangers on site and in constant contact with the locals allows a more thorough examination and authority, other than receiving fundamental feedback on locals' habits. The benefits of this postulation are to focus on local and feasible measures and to reduce the impact on biodiversity in protected areas caused by invasive species.