



Conference on water in/and transition

On June 16 2023, the town of Scuol (Engadin) hosted the second conference organized by the EUSALP Swiss presidency. The theme of the event was the water management in a transition context. Around a hundred people attended to listen to speakers from all Alpine countries.

The conference was opened by the State Councillor of the Cantons of Grisons, **Jon Domenic Parolini**, who recalled the Engadin valley's historic link with water resources and set the scene by proposing 3 major water-related issues: biodiversity, climate and energy. He called on participants to collaborate and exchange views on these issues to find a common solution. **Markus Dieth**, State Councillor Canton of Aargau, endorsed this last point, taking the example of cross-border rivers and their management. He also underlined the presence and contribution of the EUSALP Youth Council, which was present at the meeting.

The political round table opened where elected representatives were asked to answer the question: what can the Alpine regions achieve together - through cooperation? Jon Domenic Parolini insisted on the exchange of best cross-border practices, underlining the need to renew existing infrastructures. **Rainer Siegele**, Mayor of Mäder, called for a collective awareness of water issues, the only way to force politicians to act faster. **Alenka Smerkolj**, Secretary General of the Alpine Convention, brought a legislative framework to the debate, recalling the scope of the Alpine Convention, which uses binding instruments, and the need to collaborate with EUSALP stakeholders to get closer to the territories (the Water transition Task Force). **Stéphane Woynaroski**, Regional Councillor in charge of biodiversity and water for the region Bourgogne-Franche-Comté (FR) and **Aita Zanetti**, Mayor of Scuol (CH) both stressed the importance of the local level in the transition process, and the need for concrete collaboration with border regions and countries.

The second part of the conference featured concrete presentations of local success stories that can be disseminated within EUSALP. While **Andreas Nemmert**, Revital Integrative Naturraumplanung, introduced the panel with a reminder of the need for common regulations to promote this exchange of best practices and accelerate adaptation to climate change, **Stefan Hasler**, Director Verband Schweizer Abwasser- und Gewässerschutzfachleute, presented a very concrete adaptation application using maps and photos. His concept: a greener sponge city that responds to sudden changes in rainfall. Last but not least, **Paolo Mancin**, Head of Water Protection Unit, Piedmont Region, presented a special Italian feature: the use of ERDF funds to set up river and lake contracts.

A new round table was opened to discuss energy issues and links with water resources. 3 specialists took part in the panel to try and answer what could be the solution between hydropower, nature and landscape conservation interests?

Gerhard Egger, WWF Austria began by regretting the lack of a common approach at European level. In line with the Swiss Presidency's slogan "less is more", he called for a reasonable use of water resources while

respecting the existing EU framework: less is beautiful. **Etienne Viénot**, Project Manager European and International Affairs, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, also mentioned the need for a change of mindset towards greater sobriety and efficiency. Especially in situations like France, where the energy contribution of water resources is already at its maximum. He spoke of marginal gains with another system of citizen participation: the energy communities. Finally, **Flavio Ruffini**, Head of Environmental Agency of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, added a new dimension to the discussions by mentioning a conflict of uses with farmers over water. From a legislative point of view, he hoped that the exceptional emergency legal frameworks would remain in place, since they are now permanently justified.

The final round table addressed a new aspect of this cross-cutting subject, which is also dealt with in several EUSALP action groups: the links between water management and the economy. So what are the main challenges and potentials for the future? What are possible management strategies and planning approaches? **Jan Mosedale**, Interreg Alpine Space project Transtat, FHGR Institute for Tourism and Leisure ITF, University of Applied Sciences focused on the link between water use in ski resorts and the importance of diversifying tourism in these ecosystems so as not to depend on skiing.

The river, water and its externalities are very strong tourism markers that attract many tourists. **Miro Kristan**, Project team member, Soča Valley Development Centre warned the audience to preserve this windfall and remain humble to nature's gifts.

The last speaker of the conference was a local of the event: **Bernhard Aeschbacher**, Co-Director Tourismus Engadin Scuol Samnaun Val Müstair. He presented a very concrete initiative in Engadin with a trail of fountains to put this financial windfall back in the center of the village and remind locals and tourists of its importance.

Four members of the EUSALP Youth Council brought the event to a close. After reminding the elected representatives and technicians in the room of the urgent need to act, they described this conference as a starting point for accelerating collaboration within EUSALP on these issues. The young people called on the participants to disseminate the examples presented today in order to broaden knowledge of collaborative projects.