

ISCAR WORKSHOP 2017

Exploring Alpine landscapes as potential agricultural heritage systems and their contribution to human well-being

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Tolmin and Čadrg/Triglav National Park, Slovenia

ISCAR ORGANISING COMMITTEE

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Introduction

The agricultural cultural landscape reflects natural resources and humankind's past and current activities that have been carried out in the context of wider social, economic, technological, and political conditions. The basic characteristic of the landscape is its dynamics and constant change. The landscape comprises not only tangible (material) elements, but also an intangible (mental or imagined) part. As such, it is recognized as both an ecological and socioeconomic system. It reflects people's adaptation to natural features and their development of land-use strategies in dynamic and unpredictable social and political developments. Geographical settings in mountainous and hilly regions such as the Alps are especially vulnerable and unstable. Various landscape structures were generated due to this adapted land use and enhanced landscape diversity was increased, which was reflected in a mosaic landscapes. The variety of human activity had a direct impact on both landscape diversity and biodiversity. The alpine landscape thus became cultural heritage and a resource, both important for developing a sense of belonging and identity. Alpine agricultural landscapes offer people the opportunity to learn about traditional knowledge acquired through living in a mountain environment. However, the role it plays in ensuring environmental balance and in the myriad of ecosystem services should also not be ignored.

Farming in the Alps

The importance of preserving traditional agriculture landscapes in the Alps was recognized in the Alpine Convention and its Mountain Farming Protocol, which states that "*in mountain regions in particular farming has, over the centuries, shaped the countryside, giving it its historical character and cultural value.*" Livestock farming suited to local conditions is not only an important source of revenue, but also a decisive part of the identity of the countryside and culture. Agricultural heritage is an important part of numerous protected areas in the Alps, including national parks. In such areas conservation of natural and cultural heritage linked to sustainable tourism could have a positive impact on regional development.

Challenges

However, agricultural landscapes have been facing numerous challenges, mostly resulting in their impoverishment and threatening them due to modern social and economic processes. *Agriculture in the Alps cannot be competitive on the global market due to less-favorable natural conditions and thus fragile economic feasibility.* Additional challenges in rural areas are increased rural –urban migration, a rapidly aging population, and depopulation resulted in overgrowth, shrinkage of agriculture land, and loss of biodiversity. All of these processes lead to the loss of traditional ecological knowledge and practices for cultivating land.

Workshop objectives

The aim of the workshop is to explore Alpine landscapes that are important for their agricultural heritage and to assess those landscapes that fulfill the criteria for inclusion in Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). For this, it is necessary to clarify the historical dimension of these heritage systems. Besides existing traditional production systems, this workshop will also address the reactivation of former traditional practices and the restoration of traditional landscape elements. In addition, this workshop seeks to identify and compare other good practices in remote Alpine agriculture settlement in protected areas similar to the village of Čadrg and to investigate their contribution to human wellbeing.

Target public, format

The workshop addresses experts in Alpine agricultural production systems with perspectives on the (cultural) landscape, ecosystems, and socioeconomic systems. To focus the discussion, the workshop will be open to twenty to thirty experts from research and interested stakeholders from various Alpine countries and the Alpine Convention.

Locations in Slovenia

The workshop focuses on Alpine agricultural landscapes as the result of people's management of arable and forest land, and will take place in Tolmin, which was named Alpine Town of the Year 2016, and partly also in the village of Čadrg in Slovenia's Triglav National Park. Half a century ago, this mountain settlement was on the brink of dying out due to the lack of a road connection with the valley. Today it serves as an example of successful revitalization of a remote mountain community and its branding as an ecological, agricultural, and tourism destination.

Expected outcomes

The main findings will be published in a joint research article, and, based on this, the development of a transnational and transdisciplinary project regarding issues from the workshop (e.g., Alpine Space). Depending on the results of the workshop, a pan-alpine approach evaluating potential GIAHS sites in the Alps could be proposed to the Alpine Convention or its working group on mountain framing (e.g., by ISCAR as an official observer).

Support

This workshop is being jointly organized as part of (and has received financial support from) the project Cultural Landscapes Caught between Public Good, Private Interests, and Politics (<http://giam.zrc-sazu.si/en/programi-in-projekti/cultural-landscapes-caught-between-public-good-private-interests-and-politics#v>), funded as a Slovenian basic research project.