

theALPS Symposium 2016:

Alpine Tourism impresses on competitiveness

Approximately 500 tourism experts, travel agents and media representatives came together over the last three days in Innsbruck for the international networking meeting theALPS. Following a fascinating opening Media Summit event and a strongly attended Trading Room, the theALPS Symposium session was a high-quality conclusion. The synoptic propositions resulting from the research project ‘The Future of Winter Travel in the Alps’ were intensely discussed, as was the presentation from trend researcher David Bosshart, managing Director of the GDI Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute for Economic and Social Studies.

The three central challenges and the associated information from the research project ‘The Future of Winter Travel in the Alps’ were presented for the first time by the researchers from the project network – Harald Pechlaner, Ralf Roth and Hubert Siller – during the theALPS Media Summit on October 19th 2016, and then fundamentals were discussed topic by topic during the concluding Symposium. Media information on the study can be found [HERE](#). The inter-disciplinary study was carried out over a period of eight months, involving experts from EURAC in Bolzano, the Deutsche Sporthochschule Cologne and MCI Tourismus in Innsbruck as well as having the support of the universities of Grenoble Alpes and St. Gallen.

HIGH-QUALITY COMPETITIVENESS

“Due to their overall performance in the sectors of both summer and winter tourism, the Alps have a high level of competitiveness” summed up Ralf Roth from the Deutsche Sporthochschule in Cologne. Other destinations, coastal areas for example, do not have as much opportunity to exploit tourism the whole year round. The big challenge for the Alps lies in being more flexible and being able to react to changing parameters in general, in order to have more “resilience”. To achieve this, the tourism economy must ask itself a few important questions and also be able to break away from some of its dogmas. “It is not climate change itself, but weather, snow and accessibility that ever-more constitute the deciding factors in demand for winter travel in the Alps”, stated Roth, as he referred to the necessity of developing even more innovative solutions for mobility between smart cities and winter sports destinations.

A further central finding resulting from the comprehensive literature screening and the Delphi study is the economic dimension of winter travel in the Alps, according to Hubert Siller from MCI Tourismus in Innsbruck: “for the sustainable development of alpine tourism, both economically and socially, winter travel is of existential importance”. In areas such as the Tyrol, Salzburg, Voarlberg, Graubünden or Valais, at least two thirds of the income from tourism occurs in winter. The above-average turnover of winter tourism acts as a driving force for investment from both businesses and destinations. Jobs and income are thus also assured in peripheral alpine regions, not only in tourism but also in the supply industry.

The challenge for the future of winter travel in the Alps lies in fine-tuning, in the development of this traditional product, as well as in emotional structuring, affirms Harald Pechlaner from EURAC in Balzano. In the future, skiing will remain the core product of winter travel in the Alps but additional activities and regeneration/relaxation possibilities are also imperative. “A good network structure, the creation of synergies on all levels and clearly defined responsibilities constitute the deciding factors for competitive success for the destinations in the future”, according to Pechlaner. An additional finding resulting from the scientific research is the importance of accessibility to winter sports. “Winter sports offer unique experiences for all ages”, explains Ralf Roth, “for children and young people, the deciding factor is whether and how they can access winter sports through their families, schools or ski schools”. The researchers see this as a big challenge for destinations and the tourism economy but also that this offers a massive opportunity to prevail in competition against other destinations.

COMPREHENSIVE ALPINE STRATEGY REQUIRED

The researchers identified a need for action in the overall collaboration throughout the Alps. “A comprehensive sectoral communication strategy is lacking in the area of winter travel in the Alps, in particular regarding economic importance, social tolerance and objectivity in the ecological dimension”, said Hubert Siller, pointing out a deficit that should be quickly rectified.

The authors of the study further recommended that the general economic development of Europe and the development of social conditions require a comprehensive alpine strategy for the development of tourism. Big issues such as demography, changes in the work environment, shifts towards a knowledge-based society, or mobility can only be tackled jointly. It would therefore be very useful, according to the summary from Harald Pechlaner, Ralf Roth and Hubert Siller, to create a joint statistical database in the alpine countries.

MUCH MORE AND STRONGER COMMUNICATION OF THE BENEFITS OF THE ALPS

The world of tomorrow and the trends in consumerism and communication were examined by trend researcher David Bosshart. “Digitalisation is not everything but without digitalisation there is nothing”, he clarified. Networked services will become dramatically more important and perfect infrastructures and convenience, especially in alpine tourism, will be a prerequisite for customers. New 'smart' target groups could be reached by using new technologies such as virtual reality and the magic of good storytelling. Due to technology, adventures could be experienced universally. The benefits of the alpine region, the original nature with its natural resources such as water, air quality, regional culinary specialities or the feeling of vigour, are all benefits with a high-quality competitiveness. Communicating of these alpine benefits more professionally and creating a strong platform for them is extremely important.

PRESENTATION OF THE ICTRET RESEARCH AWARD

The ICRET Research Award was also presented during the theALPS Symposium 2016. Out of numerous entries, three research projects prevailed. First prize went to Jürgen Schmude and Anja Berghammer (LMU Universität München) for their project 'The Christmas Easter Shift - Simulating Alpine ski resorts' future development under climate change conditions using the parameter of the 'optimal ski day'. Second place went to Robert Steiger, Michelle Rutty, Daniel Scott und Peter Johnson (Universität Innsbruck and University of Waterloo) for their project on the future of the Winter Olympics in times of climate change. Andreas Plank (Universität Innsbruck) came third for his work on the risk behaviour when undertaking a ski tour on an online outdoor-sport platform.

ICE MAGIC INTERLAKEN WINS THE theALPS RECOGNITION AWARD

The theALPS Recognition Award was presented during the conclusion of the theALPS Symposium. Here, good practice examples from the entire Alpine region were predominantly analysed. AlpNet President Josef Margreiter bestowed the theALPS Recognition Award on Stefan Ryser (Ice Magic Interlaken) as representative of the projects presented.

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