

The ‘Alpenplan’ as spatial planning tool: a critical appraisal

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Introduction

The Alps as a natural area are of major importance providing ecosystem services and habitat functions as well as traditional cultural landscapes. The latter have been regarded as attractive tourism destinations for several generations. Due to the public good character of landscapes, conflicting interests lead to the need for government intervention in the form of spatial planning and conservation measures. This holds especially true for the German Alps situated as a small strip of 20 km width and 240 km length in the southernmost part of the federal state of Bavaria. They are the object of contradictory land use preferences of different stakeholders like the adherents of nature-based respectively infrastructure-based tourism forms situated in the peri-alpine agglomerations like Munich. Thus, the Bavarian Alps serve as a typical example for the alpine-wide problems of continuing development pressure. These are caused either by the highly competitive tourism industry or by the demand for renewable energy production (hydropower) against the background of rising natural hazard risks in the wake of climate change (Mayer, Kraus, Job, 2011).

In order to manage the differing land use demands the Bavarian State government implemented the decree ‘Alpenplan’ (AP) in 1972. 40 years after the implementation this paper aims at a comprehensive evaluation of the AP’s effectiveness as a planning tool in terms of limiting further tourism and infrastructure development in sensible alpine environments.

Emergence, intention and implementation of the ‘Alpenplan’

After 1960 the Bavarian Alps emerged as the most important domestic tourism destination in Germany. Especially the so-called “ski-boom” led to quickly rising numbers of ski areas, cable-cars and ski-lifts in the Bavarian Alps. Since the Mid-1960s environmentalists and the lobby groups of hikers and climbers like the German Alpine Club started heavily criticising this winter sports boom as an uncontrolled development. In their perspective, it seemed that the interests of nature-based tourists were completely overrun by ski area developers and that even the most exposed and ecologically sensible parts of the mountains were endangered (Karl, 1968).

After a public hearing procedure was undertaken in 1970/71 the implementation of the AP as a decree took place in 1972 already (Goppel, 2003). The targets of the AP were implemented by a central mechanism, the zoning of the entire Bavarian Alps (4393.3 km², excluding lakes) according to pre-existing land-uses, environmental sensitivity and a suitable future development. Thus the Bavarian Alps were divided into three zones by institutional regulation (see figure 1). Each zone represents an area for several main functions (Barker, 1982):

- Zone A (35.24% of the Bavarian Alps) includes all settlements and most areas with substantial pre-existing land uses, for example valley floors and tourist resorts and is earmarked „generally suitable“ (except airports) for further infrastructure development (e.g. ski lifts). Zone A provides an area for ski tourism and other mass-market forms of recreational land uses.
- Zone B (22.23%) serves as a buffer zone in which projects are permitted only if they do not conflict with more stringent regional planning requirements. Infrastructure projects require an individual review of potential impacts and are mostly allowed if necessary for forestry and mountain agriculture.
- Zone C (42.53%) is designated as a strictly protected zone in which all activities except traditional agriculture and non-intensive, “adjusted” nature-based recreational activities such as hiking and ski touring are unacceptable. Zone C is generally not suitable for any infrastructural development; the only exceptions are measures for the management of traditional cultural landscapes like forest tracks and dirt roads to reach alpine pastures – these exceptions were necessary to overcome the resistance of the primary sector and water management agencies against the AP. Zone C is covering mostly upper mountain ranges, protected areas and nearly all high ridges along the southern border to Austria as well as the areas with high erosion and avalanche risks.

Discussion and conclusion

The AP is a spatial planning instrument with certainty as well as high consistency. From a conservation point of view the effectiveness of the AP is evaluated positively because most of the projected cable-cars of the early 1970s have not been realised. Since 1972 no exceptional development projects have been permitted in the zone C.

Comparing the designation of protected areas in the Bavarian Alps over time with the extensiveness of zone C it is remarkable, that the AP is undeniable fostering preservation strategies of the sectoral planning body for nature conservation. If we look at zone C, it shows major overlapping with protected areas. Moreover, AP’s core zone stretches out far beyond, resulting in an extra share of more than 20% specifically strong protection measures. This clearly highlights the importance of zone C in ensuring an effective protection against any infrastructural development in ecological sensitive areas of the Bavarian Alps.

Concerning the limitations of the AP, it must be made very clear that the AP aims at regulating first and foremost ski tourism, which is mass tourism per se. The AP does neither prevent the intensification of ski tourism nor qualitative infrastructure development in zones A and B (e.g., higher transport capacities of modernized cable-cars, instal-

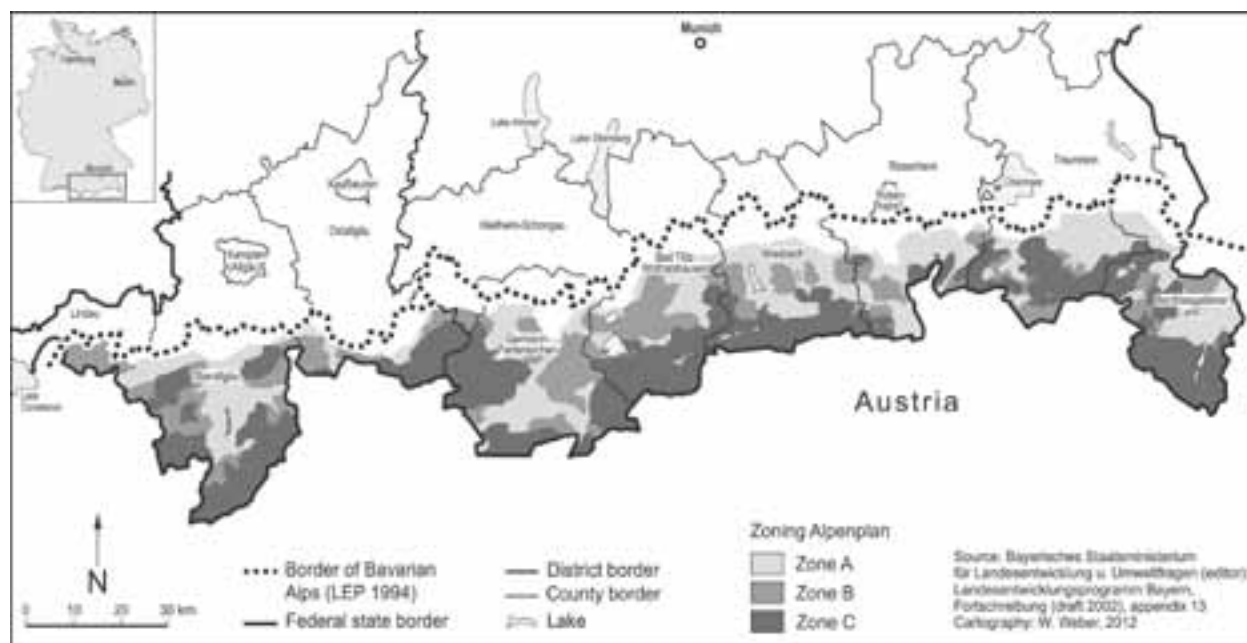


Figure 1. The Bavarian Alps and the zones of the 'Alpenplan'

lation of snowmaking facilities, or floodlighted ski runs). Furthermore, this planning instrument is not able to implement a visitor management for ski-touring or snowshoe hiking. Being both winter tourism market segments with continuously rising numbers during the last decennia, these nature-based tourists mostly do not care much about infrastructure but search for solitude and first traces, resulting in minor possibilities for their spatial concentration. If we want to protect one of the last German habitats of black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) as pristine hideaways, the AP is definitely overstrained. Additionally, the AP is not a suitable instrument to regulate the mountain biking activities in the Alps also gaining popularity in the last decades. In contrast to ski tourism, the AP explicitly allows new dirt roads to be built for forestry and alpine pasture use even in zone C which are frequently used by mountain bikers.

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