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The start of the EU project "CirculAlps"

On February 6, 2018, a kick-off meeting of the CirculAlps project took a place in the Kuchl University campus in Kuchl-Salzburg, Austria. The project is promoting the circular economy and the bio-economy in the Alpine timber sector. Slovenian Forestry Institute cooperates in the project with 4 partners from Austria, Germany and Italy. The project was launched in January 2018 within the framework of EUSALP – the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region – and is supported by the Alpine Region Preparatory Action Fund (ARPAF).



The most recent of the EU's four macro-regional strategies¹, the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), was launched in January 2016 during the partners' inaugural conference. The Alpine region is one of the most productive regions in Europe economically and is home to around 70 million inhabitants. In the future, this diverse region will face major challenges such as globalisation, demographic change, climate change and energy insecurity. In addition, the region is characterised by another special feature; its unique geographical position in Europe as a transit and holiday region with several million visitors every year. The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region provides an opportunity to tackle the aforementioned complex challenges by improving cross-border cooperation in the Alpine regions and countries. Above all, the aim of EUSALP is to generate added value through the establishment of new relationships between metropolitan regions, rural regions and mountainous regions. Three main policy areas were identified: economic growth and innovation, environmentally friendly mobility and the sustainable management of cultural, natural and energy resources². The strategy thus focuses specifically on sustainability as well as the economy and social well-being.

To support the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, the European Parliament has set aside two million euros for preparatory actions (ARPAF). These funds will be used to support the implementation of the strategy in the policy areas of environment and mobility. Five projects that will focus on demographic change, environmentally friendly mobility as well as bioeconomy and the circular economy will be funded with ARPAF funds. The project "CirculAlps", which is supported by **Slovenian Forestry Institute** as project partner and the **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Republic of Slovenia** as an observer, deals with bioeconomy and circular economy topics.

Timber as a cornerstone of the bioeconomy



Dovje, the Upper Sava Valley with the main peaks of the Julian Alps, including its highest - Triglav, photo: Iztok Sinjur, SFI

Industry has a number of options for achieving the transformation from a fossil fuel-based economy to one based on biological resources³. The quantities of biobased raw materials that are available or being developed differ on regional and national levels. In Slovenia, achieving the transition to a bioeconomy depends to a large degree on renewable biological resources from the areas of waste management, agriculture and forestry. Slovenia belongs to the most forested countries in Europe. 1,186,104 ha of forests cover more than a half of its territory (forestation amounts to 58.4%⁴), which makes the country as a great raw material supplier for the bioeconomy. Timber is a raw material that can be used directly in the construction industry. It can also be used indirectly by utilising and transforming the residual materials and other bi-products that accumulate in the timber processing industry.

In order to strengthen the forestry industry in the Alpine region⁵ in terms of bioeconomy and the circular economy, the project "CirculAlps" seeks to improve the transnational collaboration between the regions and countries involved. Five partners from Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia have joined forces with the goal of analysing and evaluating regional and difficult-to-access forest systems. The analyses will be carried out to find out whether circular economies and bioeconomies are able to create additional value for the development of the Alpine region. Slovenian Forestry Institute will contribute its many years of experience on circular economy and creating value with innovative biobased products. Subsequently, political and social framework conditions will be evaluated and recommendations be given on how innovation can be achieved in these areas. The entire process will be discussed in workshops involving local stakeholders with the goal of achieving a broad understanding and a high degree of involvement among all market-relevant participants.

The long-term objective is to improve the socio-economic status of the population in rural and remote areas of the Alpine region. Another goal is to enable the forestry industry to remain competitive in today's market and the future needs of a bioeconomy and the circular economy by developing innovative biobased, wood-based products. The "CirculAlps" project will receive funding totalling 246.000 euros from the European Union for a period of 24 months.

³ The European Union's four macro-regional strategies address challenges faced by defined geographical areas (the Baltic Sea, the Danube river, the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea, the Alps). These strategies are policy instruments aimed at strengthening cooperation between EU regions and countries in the same geographical area, contributing to economic, social and territorial cohesion. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/

² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/alpine/



³ One of the goals of the bio-economy in the future is to use more biological raw materials for energy, mobility and industrial processes. This requires detailed analysis, simulations, concepts and procedures. The focus is on issues related to crop production, biomass potentials, space requirements, conversion technologies, biodiversity networks and food safety. Agriculture and forestry, waste management and industry are closely linked in terms of raw materials.

⁴http://www.zgs.si/slo/gozdovi_slovenije/o_gozdovih_slovenije/gozdatost_in_pestrost/index.html

⁵ The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region involves seven countries and 48 regions, including the Slovenian East and West regions. <https://www.alpine-region.eu/7-countries-and-48-regions> and http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/alpine/eusalp_map.pdf