

Zeitschrift: Itinera : Beiheft zur Schweizerischen Zeitschrift für Geschichte = supplément de la Revue suisse d'histoire = supplemento della Rivista storica svizzera

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Geschichte

Band: 12 (1992)

Artikel: The Roof of Europe - ALP ACTION : the Role of the Private Sector

Autor: Aga Khan, Sadruddin

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1078159>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 27.03.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The Roof of Europe - ALP ACTION: The Role of the Private Sector

by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan

Some environmentalists wish the world could return to a utopian past when the impact of human activity on the planet was too small to have much effect on nature's balance. That day is gone for good: as five billion human beings give birth to ten billion, even the most primitive societies will irreversibly alter the environment in which they live.

As the Alps approach the twenty first century, there are many plans for a new millenium. It is likely that from 1992, the Alpine countries will, for the first time since the Roman Emperor Augustus, form part of a coherent political entity, even if governed from seven different capitals.

The protection of nature, man and culture, however, require more than political union. We have to move to an economy based on sustainable growth and the active involvement of business. Without the cooperation of industry, the world will not grow cleaner. For it is industry that turns raw environment into consumer products. Through the application of technology, industry can wreak environmental havoc, wasting raw material and polluting the earth. But, given the right incentive, industry can also diminish the quantity of resources used to fulfil human needs.

What kind of incentive can this be and who will provide it? Experience suggests that to encourage important changes in our free-market society, opportunities must be provided to make it profitable. The success of the private sector is based on profitability, along with creativity and quality. Whether one deplores this or applauds it, it is a fact, and the urgency surrounding global environmental problems is no exception. The public awareness, translated into consumers' demands and political votes, is the only force that will and is already, leading us, albeit too gradually, towards an economy based on sustainable growth.

Without public awareness, most companies will be only as green as governments make them. The greenest companies will, in turn, try to

ensure that government policies set environmental standards at levels that they can match but their competitors cannot. Governments must set sensible green goals and stick to them.

Increasingly, the managerial talent and productive resources of the private sector is being applied to what Edgar S. Woolard Jr., the CEO of Du Pont, calls corporate environmentalism. Whatever the term used, a new, dynamic and positive trend is clearly underway - company after company is lowering emissions beyond what government legislation requires, finding ways of reducing or recycling waste, dedicating unused land as wildlife habitats, helping other companies clean-up or dispose of their wastes, directing research and development toward improved industrial processes that can give them an environmental and business edge for the future. And, company after company is finding that these practices are good for business.

Corporate enthusiasm may not deliver a green utopia. Capitalism thrives on buying and selling, but the environment is best served by using fewer goods, for longer. Here again, consumer behaviour is the key to change. Our challenge is to marry these "apparently" conflicting interests, the vigour of the profit motive and the reduced demands mankind makes on the resources of the planet. If that proves impossible, it will be because individuals do not wish it - not because companies cannot make it pay.

In addition to increasing their own environmental performance, corporations can best show their leadership and social responsibility through direct involvement in collective environmental action. This is where the notion of partnership comes in.

ALP ACTION is the new International Corporate Funding Programme for the Alpine Environment launched at the World Economic Forum's Davos Meeting in February 1990. It promotes partnership and co-operation between the scientific and conservation communities, and most all the corporate sector. Projects covering a wide range of environmental issues, are submitted to ALP ACTION by environmental groups and local communities and proposed to companies for sponsoring. The success of the programme since its inception only eight months ago - the successful launching of more than a dozen projects in several Alpine countries thanks to the support of our partners - attests to the tremendous potential of this venture. The

name of our initiative - ALP ACTION - and the symbol we chose for it - a hand protecting the Alps - perfectly express its spirit and its aims.

The Alps, which most of us still perceive as an unspoilt paradise, are being affected by pollution largely exported from the industrial regions of Europe: One cannot place a dome over the Alps! Yet, the Alps are one of the natural wonders of the Earth, the source of Europe's vital hydrological system - four major European rivers, the Rhône, the Rhine, the Po and the Danube (through the Inn) originate in the Alps. Although scientists disagree on the extent and the causes of the environmental degradation, there exists a general consensus on the problems threatening the mountains - in particular deforestation, erosion, pollution and climate change, the decline of local communities, their agriculture and traditions.

Taking into account the diversity of threats facing the Alps, we were convinced, from the start, that only a large number of small, targeted projects would collectively respond to the urgency of the situation. Plenty of practical solutions are proposed - reforestation, the protection of species of flora and fauna and their habitats, studies of the impacts of infrastructure in Alpine regions, the stimulation of an authentic Alpine culture, education and awareness campaigns.

Activities such as soft tourism, for instance, can be beneficial to the Alpine environment. In fact, it is difficult to label any particular activity as abusive. Rather, it is the way in which managers plan and implement tourist policies that counts. The key to successful Alpine management is in long-term thinking rather than short-term profit. Decentralisation, small-scale technology and the philosophy of quality not quantity is a healthier basis for economic growth.

Although the Bellerive "bottom up" approach remains pivotal to successful Alpine conservation, we also require a "macro" overview of the negative effects caused by major technical infrastructures. These were often undertaken with little regard for their impact on the present and future quality of life of homo sapiens and other species in the seven Alpine countries.

The Société Générale pour l'Industrie (S.G.I.) - IC/ECOPLAN study - an ALP ACTION project commissioned with the support of my good friend Spiros Latsis - provides invaluable guidelines to right

some wrongs and avoid such costly mistakes in the future. It mirrors many of the concerns which we shared during this gathering and I sincerely hope that it will bear fruit in official circles.

ALP ACTION acts as a broker between business and environmental organizations. Its role is to identify sponsors wishing to finance selected projects that are part of the ALP ACTION portfolio and to manage the media aspects linked to these projects' achievements. The sponsors are closely associated with the project through information to the media. This media feed-back and the sponsors' participation in positive environmental action, often gets full support from the sponsors' personnel. Finally, and most important, ALP ACTION partnerships are the basis of international educational campaigns, combining the marketing efforts of companies with ALP ACTION's media campaigns.

Through direct involvement in projects, companies get the opportunity to learn from environmentalists, while giving them the benefit of their management and specialised know-how. The lessons that are to be learned from the projects can be repeated again and again by other Alpine communities.

The thirteen projects, launched thanks to the support of our sponsors this year, include a major tree-planting programme covering six Alpine countries, the preservation of an Alpine lake, an educational campaign for the protection of six threatened species, the conservation of a unique 17th Century mountain cultural heritage in the Abruzzes region of Italy, the already mentioned analysis of the impact of technical infrastructure on the Alpine regions, a scientific study of climate change in the mountains and an international media award programme to encourage quality journalism on the Alpine environment.

The ALP ACTION "Green Roof for Europe" tree planting campaign, sponsored by a leader in the food sector, will be officially launched at the Davos World Economic Forum's Meeting in February 1991. Through media, marketing and direct-mail strategies, the campaign will reach into millions of homes throughout Europe. In return for the purchase of a given quantity of food products, or simply upon written request, a tree will be planted for each consumer. The consumer will subsequently receive a certificate, signed by myself, establishing his

or her contribution to preserving Alpine forests. In addition to the ecological benefit of planting hundreds of thousands of trees, the main objective of the campaign is educational. This is why different modes of tree-planting have been chosen in each of the six countries involved: ranging from high-altitude, anti-avalanche planting for erosion control in the Swiss Alpes to large-scale planting in three parts of the Austrian Alps by school children.

The ALP ACTION-SOCIETE DE BANQUES SUISSE "Red Alert in Alpine Regions", is an exciting awareness campaign targeted at young students, tourists and resident communities. Six threatened species of plants and animals, representing different altitude zones - the Bearded Vulture, the Alpine Ibex, the Apollo Butterfly, the Alpine Salamander, the Black Vanilla Orchid and the Trumpet Gentian - show the widespread threat on interdependent life-forms in Alpine regions. Attractive posters will catch the public's attention. Six in-depth profiles, prepared by specialists, summarise population distribution, and larger issues. Practical steps are described to ensure the survival of species and their habitats. To conserve species, it is essential to protect their habitat.

The ALP ACTION - REUTERS Media Award was launched at the 1990 World Economic Forum's in Davos to encourage high-quality, in-depth media coverage of the Alpine environment. Created to recognise excellence in the fields of written press, television and press photography, the first Media Awards will be presented by Reuters at the next Davos Symposium on February 2nd 1991. Over two hundred journalists from throughout Europe are currently competing for the Award, representing the general, environmental and business press as well as national and regional television networks.

1991 will celebrate the 700th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation. Mr Jean Louis Delachaux, Director of Crédit Suisse, Geneva, which is sponsoring an ALP ACTION project to save a rare species in the Fribourg Pre-Alps, has written, "The Swiss enjoy a privileged relationship with their mountains. Mountains have shaped their identity. The rocks, valleys and forests have influenced the ways of the people and given natural form to the Confederation. The Alps have been and remain, the source of material and spiritual wealth".

To mark the 700th Anniversary of the Swiss Confederation, the 1991 World Economic Forum in Davos, will, on February 2nd, focus on the seven Alpine countries. The special ALP ACTION programme will include a plenary session for European leaders, "The Custodians of the Alps", on the future of the Alpine environment. The session will be followed by a widely covered Award Ceremony chaired by Professor Klaus Schwab, Chairman and Founder of the World Economic Forum. The ALP ACTION Awards, presented by personalities including H.H. Prince Hans Adam II von Liechtenstein and Sir Yehudi Menuhin, will reward the 1991 projects and all major ALP ACTION sponsors in recognition of their contribution to the preservation of the Alpine environment.

As Sir Yehudi aptly wrote in the preface of our ALP ACTION 1990-1991 Award Book:

"I know that this realisation is now widely acknowledged by many of those leaders of industry and commerce, of banking and statesmanship, whose intercession really makes a very great difference to our hope and our future. Everyone of these far-sighted people become "Partners in Conservation" and in this way a real and mutually trusting partnership will encircle the globe, transcending all barriers of every kind. In this way, and only in this way can we respond to the accumulating menaces which themselves transcend all barriers. Our man-made barriers of actual frontiers, of fear and suspicion, of prejudice are all artificial and will not hold up the "revenge of nature" by one millisecond. With your dedication and with our work and our hope we may win back the blessing of nature and life".