

Conclusions and final statement

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Global climate change is an indisputable fact and will produce manifold challenges to human-environment systems on all scales throughout the 21st century. In this context, mountain regions play a twofold role, i) they are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts and ii) climate impacts in mountain regions will have significant repercussions for adjacent lowlands home to half of the world's population. Thus, if current levels of quality of life for both the people in mountain regions and those in depending lowlands are to be sustained, adequate adaptation strategies to these challenges must be implemented now.

Against this background, as an initiative of the University of Innsbruck, the Austrian Academy of Science, and the alpS-Centre for Natural Hazard and Risk Management, the conference "Managing Alpine Future" took place in Innsbruck from October 15–17, 2007, bringing together more than 400 scientists, practitioners and politicians from over 20 nations.

Due to the complex topography as well as the specific and spatially intensive variability of human–environmental systems, mountain regions tend to be disproportionately affected by global climate change. As global warming is primarily a multi-faceted challenge and not a formally defined scientific discipline, this challenge needs to be answered by an inter- and transdisciplinary approach that is based on a philosophy of embracing all available scientific knowledge for the development of practical solutions.

In this sense the conference "Managing Alpine Future" tried to stimulate and foster the interdisciplinary cooperation of all relevant disciplines, stakeholders and practitioners in order to minimise bad risks and to optimise good risks arising from globally induced impacts on mountain regions. As a result of the insight that mountains all over the world are facing a specific challenge never experienced before, the participants formulated the "Innsbruck Declaration" which documents their willingness to strengthen common efforts to adapt mountain societies to this situation. It was unanimously accepted by the auditorium of the conference:

Innsbruck Declaration

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The international, inter- and transdisciplinary exchange of findings and experiences proved to be an important additional benefit. Based on sound scientific knowledge, the participants conclude that global warming is already a reality and will be reinforced in the future. Likewise, all areas of society and the economy are affected by the political, economic and cultural globalisation. In this context, mountain regions are especially vulnerable and are thus in need of regional adaptation strategies. In order to develop these, existing gaps in research should be closed, inter alia, in the fields of agriculture, society, health, mobility, energy and tourism, i.e. in core elements of Alpine economies. Joint efforts of science, politics and the industry are needed to face the challenges of global change in a sustainable way and effectively take advantage of the opportunities.

The participants of the conference welcome the willingness of the State of Tyrol to support this dialogue also in the future. They explicitly demand of the political and economic decision makers that they contribute to this process. That means that 'Managing Alpine Future' must be continued as a permanent dialogue, something that the present organisers – the University of Innsbruck, the Austrian Academy of Sciences and alpS – Centre for Natural Hazard Management – are prepared to do.