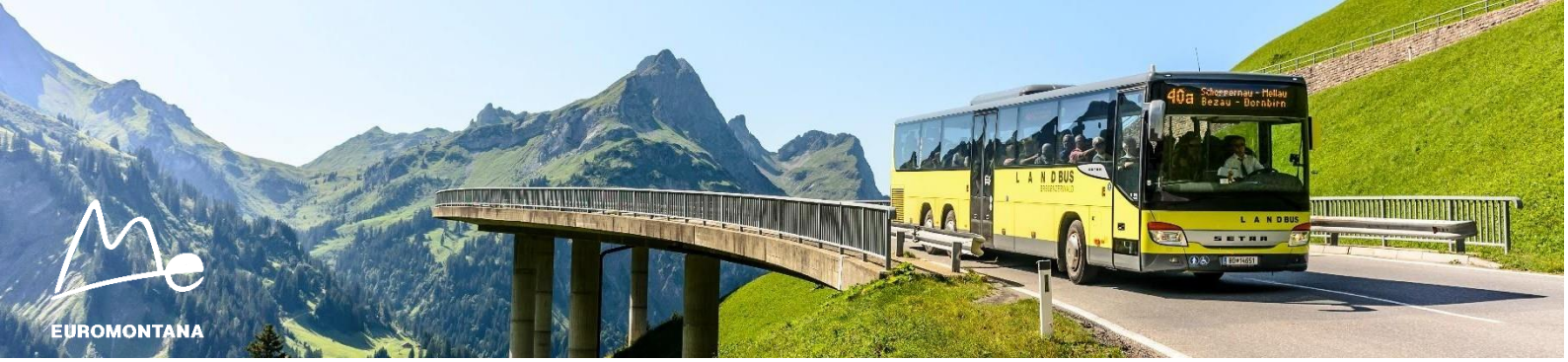
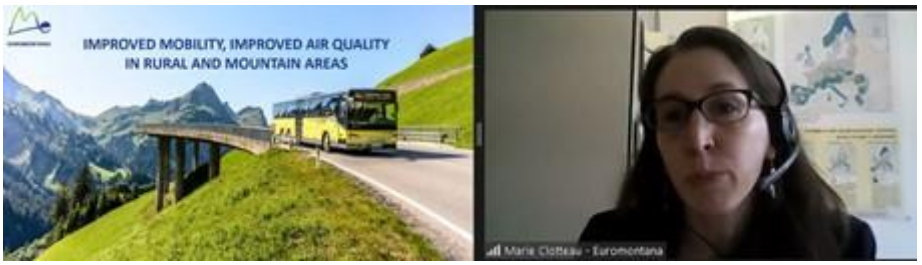


IMPROVED MOBILITY, IMPROVED AIR QUALITY IN RURAL AND MOUNTAIN AREAS

Mobility is a crucial topic for rural and mountainous areas, Euromontana therefore organised on 25th March 2021, the workshop “Improved mobility, improved air quality in rural and mountain areas” in the framework of the EU Rural Vision Week to contribute to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

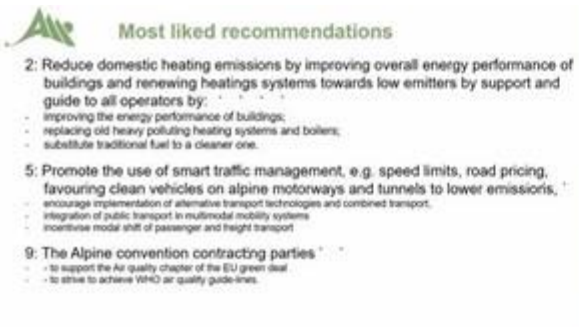
Marie Clotteau, Director of Euromontana and moderator of the event, stressed that “on the one hand, air pollution is one of the most significant environmental risk factors for human health and transport remains a major source of air pollution. In some mountain resorts, up to 57% of greenhouse gas emissions come from transport, aggravating climate change and its consequences in already seriously affected regions” before adding that “on the other hand, mobility plays an important role in the attractiveness of a region. In many rural and mountain areas, there is a persisting car dependency due to many challenges”.

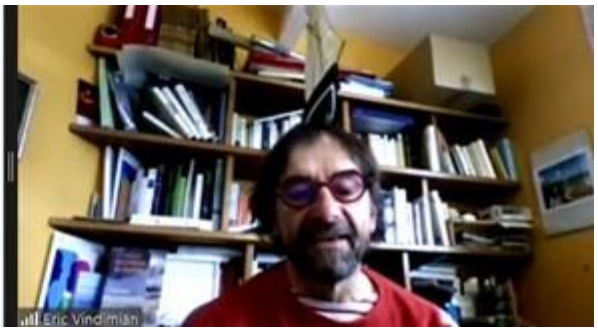
Solutions already exist, pointed Mrs Clotteau, like the elevator “Eau d’Olle Express” allowing tourists to join the ski station of Alpe d’Huez without a car; the Alpine Bus in Switzerland encouraging the use of public transport to join excursion destinations in Swiss mountain communities or the Bohinj Railway in Slovenia enabling people to put their car on a train to cross the country while reducing gas emissions. Yet, clean mobility solutions are not enough deployed in rural and mountainous areas. Euromontana’s fringe workshop therefore aimed at investigating how more decarbonised mobility options for goods and persons can be deployed in territories, thus improving air quality.



Air quality in the Alps: state of play

For Eric Vindimian, from the French Ministry for the Ecological Transition, air quality in the Alps is not only challenging in cities like Geneva, Grenoble and Torino but is also a real issue for rural areas. Mr Vindimian chaired the Alpine Convention working group on the 8th Report on the State of the Alps, which focuses on air quality. The report is not yet published, but results show that meteorological phenomena, like the inversion layer, are accumulating pollutants in Alpine valleys. Pollutants, trapped by clouds, are accumulating in the air and even in rural areas, their quantity often exceed the maximum thresholds – with increasing risks on human health.





The upcoming 8th Report on the State of the Alps also reports that traffic, together with biomass burning and secondary aerosol, is one of the main sources of emissions in the Alpine area. To address this issue, the report will make 10 recommendations to improve air quality, including 3 on mobility management. These recommendations aim at promoting the use of smart traffic management (fixing speed limits depending on pollution levels, road pricing), at encouraging combined transport, developing multimodal mobility systems, encouraging active transport modes (biking to work for instance) but also making clean vehicles available.

How to improve clean mobility?

Our workshop also presented inspiring mobility projects that contributed to greener mobility in rural and mountainous areas. Chloé Ribaudeau, from the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, presented the outcomes of the Interreg Alpine Space ASTUS project (2016-2019), which aims at reducing in the long-term the impacts of carbon emission linked to daily mobility in the Alps.

Based on the experiences of 17 pilot sites across the Alpine region, the project developed a typology of 7 Alpine territories, from metropolitan areas to towns and tourism destinations. The project developed a transnational methodology for low CO2 scenarios, a CO2 minimizer toolbox and a transnational report with recommendations to support local authorities in identifying the key factors of transport-related emissions and finding their own specific pathway towards a low carbon transport future. The elements developed within the ASTUS project are concrete transferable tools for local and regional decision makers to identify the challenges in their area and get inspiration from similar other territories.

If regional authorities have a crucial role to play in developing cleaner mobility schemes, local communities can also be involved in the process, as demonstrated Shravan Shinde, from MVV, Mobility Planning and Research in Munchen, and the Interreg Alpine Space SaMBA project (2018-2021). SaMBA looks at softer mobility measures, which can be implementing without infrastructure change.

In particular, the project aims at impulsing behavior change by promoting existing low carbon mobility offers and offering a reward to change makers (like pricing schemes, co-designed by citizens). As an example, the City of Salzburg (Austria), developed a strategy targeting people in life changing situations, such as a move to another residence or job change. The strategy is based on the idea that people often have strong mobility routines and that life changing situations are a key period during which people are more open to change their mobility habits. Local authorities therefore promoted existing mobility solutions through brochures and maps in pilot sites where new buildings were constructed. As another example, new residents in Munich receive as welcome package that explains the local mobility issues, presents low carbon solutions and offers a free public transport ticket. To encourage mobility changes in other areas, SaMBA is developing an Excel tool in which local communities and authorities will be able to look for best practices in similar territories. The tool is based on the idea that solutions implemented in urban areas will not necessarily meet the needs of rural territories; by choosing the inputs that corresponds to their reality, it will therefore enable to get inspired by similar territories depending on the type of area people live in and on the already existing infrastructures they have. This tool will be available in the Autumn 2021 for any rural and mountainous community looking for inspiration on cleaner mobility practices.

The workshop clearly highlighted that mobility remains an issue for rural Europe, with impacts both on territorial cohesion and attractiveness and air quality. The showcased projects presented inspiring existing solutions and incentives both for policymakers and citizens, that can be replicated to other rural and mountainous areas to enhance social and territorial cohesion and include all territories in the green transition.

To conclude the workshop Marie Clotteau stressed that “a new European Mobility Strategy was published in December 2020. “It is really ambitious, but we must also draw these ambitions to rural and mountainous areas”. She welcomed the fact that the upcoming Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas will address mobility issues but encouraged the European Commission to better integrate rural areas in all EU policies in the future, through a rural proofing, as this Communication cannot address all the challenges that rural Europe is facing.