

Rethinking Winter Tourism in the Alps

The TranStat consortium's position on the transition of Alpine mountain winter destinations

Introduction and addressed challenges

The TranStat project focused on **mountain resorts** as territories increasingly aware of the urgent need for a sustainable transition. These areas have long been shaped by **tourism**, as reflected in infrastructure such as hotels, ski lifts, and recreational facilities. However, this tourism-dependent model is now facing mounting **challenges**. Reliance on a single economic sector, combined with broader pressures, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and, in some cases, limited financial and strategic support from public authorities, makes these regions particularly vulnerable.

In the Alpine region, the impacts of **climate change** are already tangible: rising temperatures, decreasing snow reliability, retreating glaciers, and more frequent extreme weather events are all threatening the foundations of the winter tourism economy^[1]. At the same time, **maladaptive responses**, such as an overdependence on artificial snowmaking or expanding infrastructure into ecologically sensitive areas, risk causing further environmental degradation without ensuring long-term resilience. The challenge is therefore to work towards formalising specific transition processes for Mountain Resorts, tailored to their territorial contexts, their vulnerabilities and their strengths.

A **sustainable transition** is therefore crucial in order to reduce these vulnerabilities by fostering economic diversification, social cohesion and environmental resilience. Despite the major contribution of tourism to Alpine economies, the transition of mountain areas towards sustainability is **underrepresented** in Alpine and in some national policy frameworks. The specific challenges and needs of mountain resorts are insufficiently recognised, and examples of coherent and place-based policies addressing specifically these challenges are rare.

Even though some resorts have already begun to act, developing more diversified and resilient models of development. A broader and **more coordinated policy support is needed** to enable systemic change. To ensure lasting impact, transition efforts must actively engage local residents, businesses, policymakers and tourists.

The TranStat project (Transitions to Sustainable Ski Tourism in the Alps of Tomorrow, Interreg Alpine Space) provides **policy recommendations** to support this process. Its findings build on synergies with three complementary initiatives: BeyondSnow (Interreg Alpine Space) and PITON (Pyrenees Innovation for a Holistic Mountain Transition), MountResilience (Horizon Europe).

[1] IPCC. (2023). *Sections*. In Core Writing Team, H. Lee, & J. Romero (Eds.), *Climate change 2023: Synthesis report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 35–115). IPCC. <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>

Policy Recommendations to guide the sustainable transition of mountain resorts

To address the challenges identified above, the following actions at Alpine and national levels of governance are proposed:

European Level

- **Ensure EU-level recognition and a coherent definition of mountain areas.** Clarify and harmonise the existing definitions of mountain areas used in European programmes to improve consistency across policies. Stronger recognition would enable more targeted funding and the development of policy tools tailored to the specific needs of mountain regions, beyond current project-based mechanisms such as INTERREG. Complement the definition with the development of mountain-sensitive indicators to monitor social, economic and environmental trends in these areas and guide more targeted policymaking.
- **Develop a European Mountain Pact (post-2027):** Building on ongoing discussions within EUSALP, Euromontana and other forums, we should advocate for an EU-wide framework that ensures a consistent and comprehensive consideration of mountain territories in all European policies and programmes after 2027, which would culminate with a EU Strategy for Mountains that would include a clear vision and dedicated support for mountain sectors in transition^[2]. The President of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region recently defended the idea of a European pact for mountains. It may also be relevant to recall that a European Pact for Islands was already championed by island regions in 2022, and that a forthcoming consultation for a dedicated EU Strategy on Islands was announced in 2025^[3]. Ensure that the Pact explicitly promotes the diversification of mountain tourism and recognises the need to adapt ski-dependent economies to climate change in a socially just manner. Encourage that lessons and good practices from the Alps be transferred to other mountain ranges through pan-European cooperation mechanisms.

Alpine Region Level

- **Institutionalise participatory planning for sustainable transitions:** Establish formal, permanent mechanisms to ensure inclusive planning and decision-making at international, national and local levels. Engage residents, businesses and other local stakeholders in shaping transition pathways that strengthen local identity, cohesion and long-term well-being. Introduce “do no harm” criteria for public investments in tourism infrastructure to avoid maladaptation, ensuring that any snowmaking or slope-related investment undergoes full environmental and climate risk assessment.

[2] Euromontana. (2025, June 27). *Towards a European Mountain Pact? Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes leads the way.* Euromontana. <https://www.euromontana.org/towards-a-european-mountain-pact-auvergne-rhone-alpes-leads-the-way/>

[3] Speech by Executive Vice-President Fitto at Annual joint meeting of European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (REGI), October 2025. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_25_2418.

- **Strengthen transition through skills development:** Vocational education and training should play a cross-cutting role by equipping local populations with green, digital and entrepreneurial skills for sustainable tourism, the circular economy and climate adaptation. A place-based educational framework tailored to mountain contexts can empower local communities and foster innovation for economic diversification.
- **Integrate sectoral policies for sustainable mountain development:** Move beyond siloed approaches by aligning policies on tourism with those on mobility, land use, housing, public services, cultural heritage, digital transition, energy and biodiversity.
- **Create a permanent Alpine transition working table:** Under the auspices of EUSALP, establish a permanent working table to coordinate, share and systematise the experiences of mountain resorts transitioning towards more diversified, climate-resilient models. This permanent working table, considered as a European hub for transition, should build on existing and recent projects supported by European programmes, ensuring continuity, knowledge transfer and long-term policy learning.

National Level

- **Strengthen governance and institutional capacity for sustainable transition:** Enhance coordination between national, regional and local authorities to integrate sustainable transition goals into tourism, spatial and rural development policies. Provide technical assistance and funding mechanisms that empower small municipalities to plan and implement transition strategies.
- **Enhance climate resilience and environmental stewardship in mountain areas:** Integrate climate adaptation, risk prevention and ecosystem restoration into national tourism and spatial planning frameworks. Promote the sustainable use of resources, renewable energy and science-community collaboration to strengthen environmental resilience. Encourage transparent water and energy governance in tourism operations, with clear sustainability criteria for snowmaking and resort infrastructure.
- **Support sustainable and inclusive mountain communities:** Promote year-round liveability by balancing tourism development with housing for residents, safeguarding cultural heritage, improving access to services, and encouraging

participatory governance to strengthen local cohesion and well-being. Strengthen place-based governance mechanisms to uphold the “right to stay” in mountain territories, ensuring that local communities remain central actors in transition processes.

- Diversify and green mountain economies:** Encourage multi-sector development beyond the winter season by investing in green entrepreneurship, local value chains, circular economy models, sustainable mobility, and workforce development supported by targeted national funding instruments. Expand vocational and higher education opportunities tailored to new green professions emerging from this diversification, such as ecosystem restoration, sustainable mobility and digital hospitality management.

All Alpine-level policy recommendations are closely connected to **national action**. For example, “Strengthen transitions through skills development” requires dedicated national policies to achieve tangible and lasting results. Ultimately, transitions are local processes, it is in the Mountain Resorts themselves where change must take root. Effective **European and national policy support is therefore essential to empower local actors to drive these transitions successfully.**

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