

I am a board member of the Club Arc Alpin, an association that brings together the eight alpine clubs across the Alpine arc. We are involved in a wide range of projects aligned with our mission to support alpine clubs in their work and to strengthen international cooperation.

The Club Arc Alpin is also a project partner in the SmartHaP project launched by the University of Bergamo. The project leader chose the CAA because of our strong knowledge of the region and our network of contacts, which can help provide answers to the project's key questions. In particular, our close connections with hut managers, as well as with the people responsible for maintaining alpine paths and trails, are an important asset for the project.

The Project Leader has considered four pilot regions as suitable for SmartHaP:

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| - Italy/France | Gran Paradiso and Venoise |
| - Italy/Swiss | Ticino and Orobic Alps |
| - Italy/Slovenia | Giulia Alps and Triglav |
| - Austria/Germany | Gesäuse and Bayrischer Wald |

The Italian Region of Veneto asked to participate in the project because of the well-known impact of tourism in the Dolomites. Several hotspot areas are overwhelmed by visitors, attracted not only by the beauty of the landscape but also by the influence of highly popular social media imagery. This creates major challenges in terms of visitor management and infrastructure, as well as significant environmental impacts, including increased water consumption, air pollution, and, ultimately, disturbance of the natural environment and wildlife.

The project has been presented to and accepted by the relevant authorities of the European Commission and is currently awaiting confirmation of funding, which is expected in May. The project itself is scheduled to begin in September, as the interviews with hut owners and wardens can only take place after the seasonal closure of the mountain huts.

The project pursues two main objectives:

- Improving the management of tourist flows to alpine huts through predictive digital tools and personalized interaction with visitors.
- Developing and implementing a transnational model for sustainable tourism based on open data, intelligent recommendation systems, and participatory governance.

Let me draw your attention to one particularly unsustainable place of pilgrimage for countless social media followers rather than genuine mountain enthusiasts: the Tre Cime di Lavaredo. It is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful places on Earth and, for that very reason, attracts thousands of visitors every single day.

The municipality of Auronzo, on the southern side of the Tre Cime, has built close to the Auronzo-hut on about 2,300 m above sea level a parking area for around 700 cars. Each car pays an entrance fee of 40€, while buses pay four times as much. This generates a daily income of approximately 30,000€ daily over a period of about six months each year. Thanks to this revenue, the municipality is able to provide free childcare and many other benefits to its citizens. This is certainly a positive aspect for the people of Auronzo.

However, there is also a darker side to this success. The enormous volume of traffic creates endless queues of vehicles, bringing with it exhaust emissions, noise pollution, and a constant stream of cars that heavily impacts the alpine environment.

On the northern side of the Tre Cime is the Locatelli-hut, a mountain refuge that today faces enormous pressure from mass tourism. The hut is fully staffed and serves around 1,200 meals per day. Supplies are transported by cable car and helicopter, while accommodation is limited to 140 beds – despite receiving tens of thousands of booking requests every year.

As the hut is not connected to the public power grid, electricity is produced by two diesel generators, which consume hundreds of litres of fuel each day to meet the energy demand. At the same time, thousands of daily visitors generate large amounts of waste, and the sewage system is unable to adequately cope with the sheer volume of people. As a result, the surrounding soil and natural environment are exposed to long-term contamination risks. Although there are plans to improve the situation, it will likely take many years before effective solutions are fully implemented.

I will not bore you with further examples of overcrowded hotspots in South Tyrol, such as “Pragser Wildsee – Lago di Braies”, “Seceda”, or the picturesque church of Ranui at the end of the Villnöss-Funes Valley. And the list would become even longer if we looked beyond our own country. South Tyrol is growing – yet at the same time reaching its limits. 38 million overnight stays in 2025 mark a new record, but also a tipping point: more tourism means greater pressure on housing, infrastructure and the landscape. The question of how much tourism the region can still sustain has long been a recurring political issue.

We need to ask ourselves some fundamental questions. Is it really necessary to eat oysters and caviar and drink champagne in a mountain hut more than 2,000 metres above sea level? Is it really necessary to ride motorbikes or drive cars across the Dolomite passes simply for our own pleasure? And if we are staying in a mountain hut while climbing a summit, can we perhaps do without a shower for once in order to save water?

Can we simply return to the essence of mountaineering? Can we accept giving up some everyday comforts out of respect for nature? What is so unreasonable about that idea?

At the moment, it seems there is only one true loser: nature itself. What is needed is a profound change in mindset – among politicians, who must create the right framework, and among those working in the tourism industry. But above all, the greatest change must come from us as individuals.

Martin Knapp