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## Alpine Pearls: A Network Promoting Environmentally Friendly Holidays

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### Synopsis and Learning Outcomes

Encouraging environmentally friendly transportation is seen as an important element of mitigating climate change and developing sustainable tourism. This case study provides a good example for developing and marketing environmentally friendly mobility options in order to reduce the environmental impacts caused by tourists' travel both to the holiday destination as well as in the destination.

The Alpine Pearls Association was established on 29 January 2006 by 17 members aiming to develop environmentally friendly tourist mobility options. The number of member destinations has since grown from 17 to 28. This case study will present the role of transport in holiday travel and will examine related environmental impacts. It then turns to stakeholder management and discusses the planning, development and marketing of environmentally friendly holiday options, the importance of stakeholder involvement as well as tools and instruments for stakeholder management and communication. Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Frederick *et al.*, 1992) will be discussed in the context of Alpine Pearls' network management by pointing out the important elements of successful stakeholder management such as the analysis of formal and informal relationships, of stakeholder interests and power relations and the development of integrative stakeholder programs. The case shows that successful international stakeholder management, including collaborative processes with democratic decision-making and transparent,

respectful and trusting communication, can foster sustainable development beyond individual destinations and increase awareness and demand for environmentally friendly holidays.

After completing this case study, learners should be able to:

- 1 Understand the role of sustainable transportation in the provision of the tourism product.
- 2 Identify stakeholders and their role in delivering a sustainable tourist experience.
- 3 Analyse opportunities and challenges, and develop strategies to involve stakeholders for sustainable tourism development.
- 4 Recognise challenges and barriers to successful stakeholder management.
- 5 Explain the role of communication in successful stakeholder management.

## ■ Background

Alpine Pearls is an association of 28 Alpine destinations (see Figure 2.1), of which five are located in Austria, two in France, two in Germany, sixteen in Italy, one in Slovenia and two in Switzerland.



**Figure 2.1:** Member destinations of Alpine Pearls, *Source:* Alpine Pearls (n.d.)

Mobility concerns are at the heart of the Alpine Pearls' mission. The Alps are an important European transit region for both international trade and leisure travel between northern and southern Europe. At the same time, the Alps themselves are a very popular tourist destination attracting about 30 million international tourists (in 2006) and even more domestic tourists every year (Bartaletti, 2008). Indeed, including second homes, annual overnights in the region amount to 545 million making it the second most visited region worldwide after the Mediterranean coast (Bartaletti, 2008). Both trade and tourism (most domestic and continental tourists arrive by car (Peeters, 2004)) make heavy use of the few main roads to access or cross the Alps resulting in frequent traffic jams particularly during holiday season.

The volume of traffic in the European Alps impacts on the global environment as its emissions contribute to climate change, which in turn affects the attractiveness of the Alps as a winter destination due to decreases in snow fall as a result of temperature increases (Astelbauer-Unger *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the emissions deteriorate the local air quality and cause noise pollution. Indirectly, the traffic and its infrastructure reduce the space available to flora and fauna, as well as to agriculture and other human activities. This means that while the traffic from tourists travelling to the European Alps signifies economic well-being, it also negatively affects the residents' quality of life and the tourist experience, thus lessening the attractiveness of the destination and ultimately threatening the economic well-being which it has brought.

Recognising the need for developing environmentally friendly tourism in the European Alps, Alpine Pearls has established an active network of stakeholders to develop environmentally friendly holiday packages and market the idea of sustainable tourism and transport. Their main initiatives focus on the promotion of environmentally friendly transport options for arrival and departure, the development of environmentally friendly transport services within and between the member destinations including shuttle services, and the provision of environmentally friendly activities in the destination like riding e-bicycles and horse-drawn carriages, driving electric cars, cross country skiing, hiking, horseback riding and more (see Appendix).

## ■ Key Concepts

Tourism is inherently linked to the movement of people as they move from the traveller **generating region** via the **transit route region** to the tourist **destination region** and back (Leiper, 1979). Considering the impacts of tourist movements to and from the destination but also within and between the destinations, **mobility** is an important concept in regards to sustainable tourism development.