

YOUNG ACADEMICS AWARD 2023-2024

RESPONDING TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES AND MAINTAINING HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE ALPS

Research and innovation are key elements for a more sustainable development of the Alps. Young academics play a crucial role in this, helping to shape the future of this unique mountain environment. The Young Academics Award recognises this role by rewarding outstanding master's theses on relevant Alpine topics. This is an initiative of the Slovenian Presidency of the Alpine Convention and the Permanent Secretariat, with the support of the Alpine Convention Infopoints of Chamonix (FR), Domodossola (IT), Grand Paradis (IT), Mojstrana (SI), Tolmin (SI) and Villach (AT). The initiative is run in collaboration with ISCAR.

Responding to environmental changes and maintaining high quality of life in the Alps

The Alps have an incredible and unique environment. They are not only home to more than 43.000 animal and plant species, but also to almost 15 million people. Even just co-existing in this space limited by a rugged topography may seem challenging. In addition, however, many human activities such as agriculture, transport or tourism often come into conflict with each other, and especially with the protection of the environment. But the natural environment is not only one of the most recognisable characteristics of the Alps; it is also their biggest asset. The Alps are ecologically important as, among others, a biodiversity hotspot or source of fresh water not only for the region, but for a large part of the European continent. It is therefore vital to preserve this natural environment, its ecosystem services and biodiversity to maintain high quality of life in the Alps (and beyond).

Today we face many environmental changes and challenges in the Alps. Climate change has seen temperatures rise twice as fast here as the Northern hemisphere average. We see corresponding changes in weather patterns, which are in turn linked to an increased risk and unpredictability of natural hazards. This also affects water availability (including snow) and increases the stress on flora and fauna, resulting in the loss of biodiversity. In addition, various human activities and soil consumption contribute to this loss and reduction of wildlife habitats and, consequently, a decline in ecosystem services. All these changes have a direct socio-economic impact on us, including on our food and energy production, which may result in a reduced life quality for the Alpine inhabitants and visitors if not addressed and dealt with properly.

To preserve and restore the quality of natural environment and ensure resilience and sustainable development in the future, the demand for new solutions is more acute than ever. And the Alps, with their mountain-specific challenges, present an ideal ground to lead the way in adaptation and mitigation action. For these reasons, the Slovenian Presidency of the Alpine Convention, together with the Permanent Secretariat, have chosen to dedicate the seventh edition of the Young Academics Award to the topic of responding to environmental changes and maintaining high quality of life in the Alps. We look forward to receiving innovative and creative contributions from young researchers whose master's theses are dedicated to the Alps or (at least partly) focus on the Alpine territory. They should cover one or a combination of the following aspects from an Alpine perspective:

- Climate action and biodiversity protection through nature-based solutions (NBS):
 - adaptation and mitigation measures in urban areas (urban water management, greening of settlements, urban heat island prevention, etc.)

- restoration (and protection) of ecosystems and habitats and biodiversity loss prevention
- management of landscape characteristics important for biodiversity and ecological connectivity
- soil protection, sustainable management and use of soil
- NBS for natural hazard risk reduction
- NBS for sustainable management of forests, agricultural land and water
- **Governance for resilient communities in the light of environmental change** (at different levels of governance): quality of life aspects in mitigation and adaptation policies, cross-sectoral approaches (knowledge development, practical implementation, participative processes, awareness raising, sustainability of lifestyles/behaviour)
- **Socio-economic aspects of environmental change adaptation and mitigation**: cross-sectoral approaches, balancing adaptation and mitigation measures with environmental measures and the economy

The prizes

Three main prizes will be awarded by the Slovenian Presidency and the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention to works with Alpine-wide relevance:

- 1st prize: €1.000
- 2nd prize: €750
- 3rd prize: €500

Six additional Infopoint prizes will be awarded to works that are thematically relevant and have a main and/or specific focus on the areas where the following Infopoints of the Alpine Convention are situated and active:

- Infopoint Chamonix (FR), awarded by the [Community of Communes of the Valley of Chamonix Mont-Blanc](#): €500;
- Infopoint Domodossola (IT), awarded by the association [ARS.UNI.VCO](#): **two nights for two persons** with half-board in **Domodossola** (IT);
- Infopoint Grand Paradis (IT), awarded by [Fondation Grand Paradis](#): **six nights for one person** at the Hostel “La Mine” in the Miners’ village in **Cogne** (IT);
- Infopoint Mojstrana (SI), awarded by the [Slovenian Alpine Museum](#): **three nights for two persons** with half-board in the Aljaž Hut in the **Vrata Valley** (SI);
- Infopoint Tolmin (SI), awarded by the [Soča Valley Development Center](#): €500;
- Infopoint Villach (AT), awarded by the [Infopoint of the Dobratsch Nature Park](#): €600 and **one overnight for two persons** with breakfast in the **Dobratsch Gipfelhaus** (AT).

Requirements and selection process

The following requirements must be met in order to participate in the award:

- the submitted work must be a master’s thesis (or equivalent level);
- candidates must have achieved the corresponding master’s degree (second-cycle academic education) between 1 January 2021 and by 31 July 2024¹;
- the thesis must be written in English, French, German, Italian or Slovenian;
- the thesis must have relevance to the topic and the [geographic area](#) of the Award.

The submitted theses will be evaluated by an international scientific jury selected by the Alpine Convention. The decisions of the jury are final and not contestable.

The selection process is conducted in two phases.

¹ In case the candidate has not yet finished their studies but will defend their thesis/take the final exam by latest 30 September 2024, they are still allowed to apply. However, the submitted thesis must be in the final draft version with all of the content clearly developed. The candidate will need to follow up with proof of graduation after the application deadline.

In the **first phase**, the pre-selection, the participants' works will be assessed based on the evaluation of the submitted documents (see section *How to apply*) in accordance with the following criteria:

- direct relevance of the thesis to the topics and sub-topics stated in the call as well as to the entire Alpine Convention territory and processes;
- relevance and originality of the analysis and its theoretical contributions to further research;
- capacity to propose innovative, practical, comprehensive, and Alpine-specific solutions;
- academic value, interdisciplinarity, originality, clarity.

In the **second phase**, a maximum of 8 finalists for the main prize category will be invited to the *finalists' workshop* to be held in Slovenia in the framework of the next [Alpine Conference](#). Here, they will have the opportunity to present their work and discuss directly with the jury. On the same day, the jury will decide on the winners who will be announced and awarded in the presence of the ministers participating in the Alpine Conference.

The winners of the Infopoint prizes will also be invited to the award ceremony. The Infopoint prizes will be awarded solely to works that focus specifically on one of the territories of the Alpine Convention Infopoints mentioned above, while at the same time fulfilling the thematic and quality criteria. Should these conditions not be met, the prizes offered by the partners of the Alpine Convention may not be awarded.

A candidate can **either** be awarded an Infopoint prize **or** a main prize.

How to apply

First phase

In order to participate, candidates are invited to complete the [online application form](#) in English language in all its parts by **31 July 2024**, attaching to it:

1. a digital copy (in pdf format) of the complete work in one of the Alpine languages (German, French, Italian, Slovenian) or English;
2. a copy of the graduation certification with the final mark. If the student has not yet graduated, the candidate will need to present a declaration with the foreseen date of the graduation during the application process.

Second phase

The finalists will be asked to present their thesis in the finalists' workshop and to prepare a visual/graphic presentation of their work to be presented in the context of the Alpine Conference and other events, as well as for digital distribution (more details will be provided at a later stage). Moreover, applicants need to be available to travel on the dates of the workshop, held in parallel to the Alpine Conference (21 January 2025). The award ceremony will take place on this occasion and the travel and overnight costs will be reimbursed by the Alpine Convention.

Deadlines

Deadline for applications: **31 July 2024**

Notification to successful applicants for the second phase: during **December 2024**

Workshop and award ceremony: during the **XVIII Alpine Conference** (Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia, 21 January 2025)

Contact

For any questions, please contact yaa@alpconv.org.

Further information:

<https://www.alpconv.org/en/home/projects/young-academics-award/>

Online application form:

www.alpconv.org/en/home/projects/young-academics-award/yaa-application/

In cooperation with:

