

YOUTH PARLIAMENT OF THE ALPINE CONVENTION

Handbook

1. The YPAC at a glance (general information)

This handbook provides information for students who are interested in participating as YPAC delegates and for teachers and organizers who wish to know more about what the YPAC is and how it works.

1.1. What is the YPAC?

The YPAC was founded by Akademisches Gymnasium Innsbruck and the Alpine Convention. It brings together young people from different regions to discuss current topics regarding the Alpine region in a parliamentary simulation. It aims at giving insights into parliamentary structures as well as current topics which are of concern to the Alpine region. Moreover, it is a platform for a cultural exchange and networking among young people.

The YPAC is a students' parliament for representatives of all member states of the Alpine Convention, during which issues of the Alpine region are discussed from the point of view of young people. The work is documented in two ways:

- The general assembly votes on a resolution with recommendations for action, which is handed on to the committee of the Alpine Convention and to politicians in the respective regions who are not bound to act upon the resolutions. They serve, however, as valuable orientation and guidance for all decisions.
- The media group produces newspaper and web articles as well as a supplement to Alpsinsight, which reach a wider public than the resolution.

The simulated parliament meetings...

- are the basis for an active participation of young people in the development of their Alpine surroundings and environment;
- are a well-organized process for young people to develop and discuss opinions of their own about issues of the Alpine Convention;
- and are therefore the basis for young people to take on responsibility in the regional and European process of collaboration.
- Furthermore, young people are given the opportunity to be heard by politicians and opinion leaders.

1.2. Organizational matters and partners

Each of the following participating schools sends a delegation of students between 16 and 19 years of age to the YPAC:

- Akademisches Gymnasium Innsbruck (Austria)
- Gymnasium Sonthofen (Germany)
- Karolinen-Gymnasium Rosenheim (Germany)

- Lycée Frison Roche de Chamonix (France)
- Fachoberschule für Soziales "Marie Curie", Meran (Italy)
- Liceo Ginnasio "G.b. Brocchi", Bassano (Italy)
- Gimnazija Kamnik (Slovenia)
- Druga gimnazija Maribor (Slovenia)
- Liechtensteinisches Gymnasium Vaduz (Liechtenstein)
- Kantonsschule Trogen (Switzerland)

The YPAC takes place once a year. Every year, it is hosted by a different school. The last parliaments took place in Innsbruck (2006/2007), Maribor (2008), Meran (2009), Rosenheim (2010), Herisau/Trogen (2011) and Liechtenstein (2012).

The YPAC 2013 is set to take place in Sonthofen. Therefore, it is organized by the Gymnasium Sonthofen in cooperation with the municipality of Sonthofen, the CIPRA (International Commission for the Protection of the Alps) and the association "Alpine Town of the Year" as a new partner. The "Alpine Town of the Year" invites politicians from its member towns to Sonthofen, which gives the young people the opportunity to actively pursue their wishes and concerns in their home countries beyond the YPAC¹.

The topics closely follow the principles of the Alpine Convention².

The schools support the participation of the student delegates. There are no costs for delegates, as travel expenses are paid for and they are hosted by families in the region. Accompanying teachers and experts are usually in guest houses.

The official language of communication in the YPAC is English. All final documents are, however, translated into the official languages of the Alpine Convention (French, Italian, Slovenian, and German).

2. Structure and elements

2.1. Schedule

Since every YPAC is organized by a different school, the exact schedule varies each year.³ Usually, the main elements of the week are the opening and the closing ceremony, at least four committee meetings and the general assembly. There are also press conferences (internal and/or public), as well as a round table or a public market at the end of the week. The evening program depends largely on the organizing school; usually there is an informal social event on Thursday evening.

2.2. Elements: Who is who

2.2.1. Delegates

Students who participate in the YPAC are delegates of their school (and representatives of their country).

¹ See 2.2.6 Platform future

² See homepage for information about previous years' topics and resolutions.

³ See appendix 1 for the provisional schedule for 2013

2.2.2. Committees

Much of the parliament's work is done in committees. A committee consists of one delegate from each school, a committee president and a committee vice-president. There are four committees who are assigned specific issues related to the topic of the current year's YPAC. Under the guidance of the committee presidents, the delegates have at least four committee meetings in two days to write at least five postulations with measures.

The committee presidents lead the meetings. The delegates are expected to prepare for the discussions in advance by doing research on the relevant issues, including the position of their respective regional governments. During their research, they should also develop opinions of their own and stand up for them during the discussions. At the end of the committee meetings, the committee has to decide on and write at least five postulations (and measures) and a strategy on how to defend these in the general assembly.

2.2.3. Committee presidents

The committee presidents are the link between the YPAC presidency and the delegates. They lead the debates in the committee meetings and make sure that formal and procedural standards are met. They moderate the meetings if necessary, but they are not allowed to influence the delegates in their opinions. They provide the delegates with information and they help with the preparation (e.g. they distribute preparation sheets, further information on background reading in books, online and newspaper articles). Furthermore, it is their task to make sure that all delegates fulfill their duties.

During the general assembly, committee presidents must make sure that all requested textual changes to their postulations are recorded.

Those wishing to participate in the YPAC as committee presidents must have been delegates in a previous session. A committee president should have good leadership skills and speaking abilities. A committee president should also be an impartial politician.

2.2.4. Presidents

Each YPAC is chaired by three presidents, who are responsible for the whole session. They help with the organization, keep in contact with the committee presidents and monitor and control all the participants' work. At the general assembly, they welcome all the delegates, hold the opening speeches and most importantly, they lead the general assembly.

Aspiring presidents must have been delegates or committee presidents in a former YPAC session. A president should have good leadership and organizational skills, excellent speaking abilities and must be an impartial politician.

2.2.5. Media group

The media delegates document the YPAC. There are three media groups:

2.2.5.1. Folio group (Association's annual report)

6 participants: Writers in the folio group produce a digital document, a supplement for the annual report of the association "Alpine Town of the Year" that will be sent to 500 addresses of decision makers in the Alpine region. Some texts should also be published in national magazines focused on environmental education and participation issues. Participants decide about the contents, format and layout of the texts. The texts are based on the work done in the parliament and the content of the platform future. This folio can also include interviews with politicians or recommendations how to implement youth participation in politics.

The folio group will be intensely linked to the platform future and have a constant exchange with these participants. Aim of this publication will be to raise awareness amongst decision makers for the needs and visions of the youth and to perceive the young generation as enrichment for their projects and strategies.

This insert for the annual report of the association "Alpine Town of the Year" is written in the original language of each participant (German, French, Italian or Slovene). The participants are coached by a professional to write their texts, and the texts are translated by external translators. The publication is in four languages.

Writers for the folio group should be interested in texts and creative writing. They should be eager to learn all the necessary skills to write a magazine. These skills include topics like: How do I write a powerful text? How do I draw a connection between my text and possible pictures? What's the significance of a headline? How is a page set up and developed? What is a layout? How important is typography in my text? Which mistakes are acceptable and what should I try to avoid? How to present their outcome in an interesting shape to the audience (at the market stand Friday morning)?

They are responsible to search for relevant magazines in their home countries where to publish their texts after the YPAC and already get in contact with them before the YPAC 2013. Therefore they get support from the CIPRA.

2.2.5.2. Press group

14 participants: The media group language depends on the countries it is aimed at. The main target in 2013 will be the media of Germany/Bavaria and the media from the home regions of each participating school (i.e. the newspapers of the municipalities but also regional and local newspapers, radio and TV stations).

Working in the media group includes identifying the target media and the contact people (before the YPAC week), inviting them to the official press conference, writing press releases, suggesting articles, organizing interviews, giving additional information and material to the public media if asked for it, and sharing your information and knowledge at the official press conference.

Writers for the press group should be interested in journalistic writing and photography. They should be willing and able to interact with professional editors and people in charge of the specific media.

They are responsible to search for media contacts in their home countries before the YPAC, where they can publish texts during and after the YPAC. Therefore they get support from the CIPRA.

The press group will also be responsible for internal communication amongst all YPAC participants (black board / flying facts / information screens). These formats are still to be defined together with the participants before the YPAC.

Together with the platform future and the folio group, the press group will organise the public market on Friday morning that will take place after the press conference.

2.2.5.3. Web group (YPAC homepage)

6 participants: The structure of the website and the basic content will be set up before the YPAC week. The web group will work on various tasks: informing the YPAC 2013 participants and people who are interested in the YPAC, including general information on YPAC, information on past YPACs, information on the YPAC 2013 (atmosphere, photo impressions, results). The language of the webpage is English.

Web group writers will fill the website with content, in particular with daily news regarding the work achieved, the evening activities and the atmosphere, collecting the “pool of ideas” (all the ideas that have come up during the committee meetings), photos, quotes and interviews, and results of the YPAC week (resolutions, productions of the other media groups, media releases and published articles, etc.). The web group is in close exchange with the parliament and is also responsible for documenting the less formal aspects of the YPAC.

Writers for the web group should be interested in writing journalistic entries in English and have a good command of English. They should also be interested in journalistic photography and possibly filming for a homepage.

2.2.6. Platform Future

12 participants: Young people that are interested to spread the ideas and results of the YPAC 2013 and motivated to dispense their visions for a sustainable future of the Alps build a working group called “platform future”.

This working group consists of four core-members called “focus group” and 8 members that work in the committees but join the platform future in certain timeframes every day to give thematic inputs.

→ They collect ideas and develop concepts how YPAC and its results can enter in politics and into public after the week in Sonthofen. They pick up ideas from discussions with politicians and amongst YPAC participants. They will present their ideas during the General Assembly of the Alpine Town of the Year Association in Lecco/IT in April 2013 and groups of two will present their visions in member towns in each Alpine country. It is up to the young people to choose the right format of presenting their ideas and to collaborate with the representatives of each town.

→ They build a transnational network and stay in contact for exchange of information during the year. These young people receive support from a coach during the YPAC and the association “Alpine Town of the Year” to implement their concerns and wishes. Ideally, they should also be supported by a teacher at their school during the year.

→ This future platform should guarantee that the young students' hard work and their postulations not only get recognized by politicians and decision makers but that they have the opportunity to go a step further and actively discuss the implementation of their ideas and forms of youth participation in political processes.

With the support of the "Alpine Town of the Year" Association young people can actively pursue their wishes and concerns in their home countries. They have a contact point for their requests and a continuous collaboration can be built up. The association guarantees that the young people are invited by member towns in their home countries to present their ideas.

Herewith the platform future offers young people that are willing to be active citizens for a sustainable development of the Alpine region, to continue to work on their ideas and postulations of the YPAC. For the YPAC, the platform future is a chance that the work of the young students is carried further and their work gets cherished.

2.3. Elements: Structure

2.3.1. Committee meetings

After a coaching on how to approach the upcoming task in order to reach useful results, the delegates work in their committees during the first two days of the YPAC. The committee meetings are led by the committee presidents. The delegates are expected to present their opinions in addition to their respective region's political and economic position regarding the topic. The different positions are discussed. At the end of the committee meetings on Wednesday, each committee should have at least five postulations to present at the general assembly.

2.3.2. Internal communication

Those committee members who are also part of the platform future join the "focus group" during certain timeframes every day and share their ideas and the work that has already been carried to keep everyone up to date. Problems that might have come up in the committees may also be discussed.

On Wednesday morning the delegations (presidency, committees and working groups) meet and catch up on the work that has been done in the committees in order to prepare for the general assembly in the afternoon.

2.3.3. The general assembly (1)

At the YPAC 2013, the first part of the general assembly will already be held on Wednesday afternoon.

1. The presidents open the general assembly: They welcome the delegates and explain the exact schedule of the general assembly.
2. First reading of the postulations in the following order:
 - Committee 1
 - Committee 2
 - Committee 3

- Committee 4
- 3. All participants can ask questions to clarify misunderstandings after each committee's presentation. Textual changes can be applied, provided that there are no objections to those changes; the presidency has to request the changes.
- 4. All delegates get together in order to exchange their ideas and discuss their postulations.
- 5. Now the committees have time to change their postulations, which needs to be done in written form.

2.3.4. Input from politicians

Thursday morning

1. The delegates get the opportunity to discuss their postulations in their committees with politicians from different alpine towns from various countries. They present their ideas to the politicians and receive feedback. The politicians point out problems in the students' line of argument and help them to improve their postulations. The discussion should focus on feasibility and help students to realize which of their postulations needs to be revised or should be left out altogether either because they are not innovative or too idealistic and would most likely not be implemented. This allows for the postulations and later on the resolution to be heard and taken seriously by politicians and a wider public.
2. The committees meet again and decide on changes and amendments to their postulations based on their discussion with the politicians. They choose four postulations, which are presented in the second reading at the general assembly. Changes of postulations need to be done in written form.

2.3.5. The general assembly (2)

Thursday afternoon

1. Second reading of the postulations in the same order as in the first reading: Changes or new postulations are presented to the general assembly.
2. Discussion of the different postulations. Same order as in the reading.
3. Each committee gives a speech in favour of their postulations. Additionally, the other committees can also hold a speech against one or more postulations.
4. Vote: Each delegate receives a ballot paper and ticks ten out of 16 postulations. If they tick more than ten postulations, the vote is invalid. If they tick less than ten postulations, the vote is still valid. The presidents collect the ballot papers in a voting box. The results are displayed and announced in the following.

2.3.6. Public press conference and public market

Before the official press conference on Friday morning, students will present the resolution to politicians from their respective home towns or countries. Thus they are given the opportunity to talk to politicians about their ideas concerning the topic in their mother tongue.

Afterwards the resolution will be presented at a public press conference. Therefore politicians and the media will be invited as well as local NGOs, other students from the Gymnasium Sonthofen and the YPAC guest families.

The presidents, committee presidents and the press group are responsible for the organization and they lead the public press conference.

Following the press conference, there will be a public market where the committees will have the opportunity to present the work they have done in order to come to the final resolution in the form of a work exhibition. The press group will be responsible for its shape, together with the platform future and the folio group.

2.3.7. Opening and closing ceremony, party

At the opening ceremony, the presidents welcome delegates and participants and there is a presentation by each of the participating schools.

On the evening after the general assembly, the delegates come together for an informal event (a party).

The last official part of the YPAC is the closing ceremony, which takes place after the public market. Diplomas are handed out to the delegates and closing speeches are held.

2.4. Elements: Documents

2.4.1. Postulations

Each committee writes at least five postulations on the topic they have been assigned. The postulations explain why the issue in general and the particular problem they focus on needs to be addressed and recommends measures that should be taken to solve the problem.

It is important to note that a postulation should not address the whole issue as such (e.g. reducing travel), but should be about one specific problem (e.g. reducing private car use for the commute) and propose one or more precise measures in order to put it into effect.

2.4.2. Resolution

The resolution is the most important document of the YPAC, because it summarizes all the work that has been done during the week. The resolution explains why the issue needs to be addressed, and recommends measures that should be taken to resolve the issue.

- Introduction and justification of the topic: why something needs to be done.
- Measures: how the situation can be improved.
- Responsibility: who is in charge of implementing the measures.

How to write a good resolution:

- A resolution should be dedicated to a clearly defined topic. Neither the public nor the media will take note of a resolution that demands “a higher standard of life” or “sustainability in the Alps”. People find it easier to concentrate on clearly defined topics such as “retirement

provisions in rural areas” or “health care in mountainous areas”. It is also important to focus on one topic and not include too many different topics in one resolution.

- A resolution should take a firm stand and make clear demands. It is not enough to demand “good health care also in rural areas”; about three to five detailed suggestions that readers can use as a basis for action should be included.
- A good mixture of innovation and realism is advisable. If all measures are too idealistic to be implemented, it is difficult to take the resolution seriously; but if all measures are too realistic and only demand what is within reach anyway, progress might be slow to come. It’s a fine line between idealism and realism – delegates should be aware of the aims each strategy can reach and mix these concepts accordingly.
- The resolution should be aware of its target audience. If the people living in the Alps are the intended audience, then the measures and demands will be different than if the ministers of the environment of the Alpine countries are addressed. The target audience should be chosen according to the topics at hand. If the resolution seeks to change EU law, then the target audience should not be Alpine municipalities but EU ministers.
- It is always important to have a well-written text with a good title and a short introduction. The text should be neither too long nor too complicated or technical. It is better to use good examples than abstract terminology, e.g. “If access to a hospital or to a doctor is limited for a population in the Alps that grows older, then...” instead of “The demographic evolution in the Alpine region presents a challenge for municipalities to ensure medical care.” Investing time into wording and form of a text is well worth it – no one enjoys dealing with a boring text.
- The question of the topic and the target audience should be addressed at the beginning.

3. Preparation

Preparation is an important part of the YPAC. Without a thorough knowledge of their topic, delegates will not be able to follow the discussions, let alone contribute effectively. Delegates should also be familiar with the important terms in English related to the topic.

Delegates are expected to know the Alpine Convention, CIPRA and the association “Alpine Town of the Year” as well as their role in the different regions. They should also be aware of current events relating to the Alpine Convention and especially the current topic and political and regional positions related to the topic their committees are assigned. Media delegates should have a clear overview of the conference’s topics in order to ensure proper reporting.

Delegates could use the following outline for their preparation:

Topic	
Introduction	A short paragraph about the topic in general, the reason why it is on the political agenda and why it is an important act for the Alpine Convention. Mention the most important issues and why they are more significant than others.
Position of the region you come from	Mention the most important issues and why they are more significant than others. It is also a good idea to give examples of how the region is trying to deal with the issue in question.
Personal opinion	Apart from the positions of your country, your personal ideas and ideals play an important role during the discussions. Please point out why you agree or disagree with the official positions. Clearly state your own opinion.

Aims	Your task during the YPAC will be to come up with solutions to problems linked to your topic. You need to be prepared and to think about your own position before the conference starts.
Sources	For the YPAC staff as well as for future delegates it is interesting to know where you have taken your information from. Please list your reference sources: literature and websites.

4. Code of behavior

The YPAC is a forum for politically interested young people from all Alpine regions. All participants are required to show tolerance and behave respectfully towards one another. Attendance during all meetings is mandatory, and absences without valid excuses may lead to the exclusion from the conference. Drug use and alcohol abuse are strictly prohibited.

Participants are asked to dress formally during the YPAC (no jeans, sport shirts or sneakers). Leisure wear is suitable for spare time activities, group-finding activities and the party.

5. Application and contact

Students wishing to participate should contact their teachers. Details for the application should be announced in the fall of the current school year.

The Austrian Ministry of Environment serves as a partial sponsor for board and lodging, as does the provincial government of the country in which the session takes place.

Akademisches Gymnasium Innsbruck and the office of the Alpine Convention will try to do some fund-raising in private and through other official institutions, in order to be able to support the participation (which is free of charge) of all the representatives in the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention. Teachers from the host school are asked to look for sponsors in their own region. Schools are asked to finance the travel tickets in advance. Participants will be reimbursed after having presented the tickets.

Contact

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Akademisches Gymnasium or the host school of the current YPAC.

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YPAC program 2013 / Southofen (Germany)

Timetable	Monday 11th March	Tuesday 12th March	Wednesday 13th March	Thursday 14th March	Friday 15th March			
Morning	08:00 – 09:00	Group-finding activity at school		Internal communication	Discussion with politicians in committees			
	09:00 – 10:00	Coaching for committee members	3rd committee meeting			Media group (press, folio, Platform future)		
	10:00 – 11:00	Web group	Web group					
11:00 – 12:00		Media group (press, folio, Platform future)	Media group (press, folio, Platform future)	Platform future	8:30 – 10:00 Presentation of final resolution to politicians			
Afternoon	13:00 – 14:00	Arrival	1st and 2nd committee meeting (incl. coffee break)	4th committee meeting	6th committee meeting			
	14:00 – 15:00					15:30 – 16:30 General assembly		
	15:00 – 16:00						16:30 – 17:30 Exchange of ideas amongst delegates	
	16:00 – 17:00							17:30 – 18:00 5th committee meeting
	17:00 – 18:00							
					13:00 General assembly			
Evening	18:00 – 24:00	Students: Host families Teachers: Briefing and dinner	Official opening ceremony at school (incl. finger food)	“Hüttenabend“: Cultural program with dinner	19:30 Party (incl. dinner)			
Lunch	13:00 – 14:00				13:00 – 14:30 Closing ceremony & diplomas			