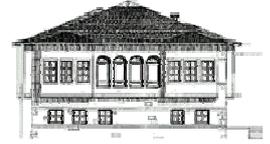




NATIONAL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
METSOVION INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CENTER (M.I.R.C.)
for the Protection and Development of Mountainous Environment
and Local European Cultures



METSOVION INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CENTRE (M.I.R.C.)
DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Regarding the Consultation process for the Call 5 of Horizon 2020 as well as the relevant discussions that took place among the members of the MRI-Europe network, **Metsovion Interdisciplinary Research Center (M.I.R.C.) of the N.T.U.A** prepared the following recommendation:

Why do mountains matter?

Mountain regions cover 36% of Europe and host more than 17% of the continent's population.

Mountainous areas are globally recognized as biodiversity hotspots and are the headwaters of all Europe's major rivers. Apart from their natural, environmental and mineral wealth, they are also considered as cultural reserves, where traditional social structures, customs, habits, professions, know how and techniques are still lively transferred from generation to generation. They are also great examples of successful coexistence between human beings and their environment, as mountainous people have managed to adapt, interrelate and interact with it in harmony and with respect.

Therefore, mountain regions provide essential ecosystem services crucial to the development of mountainous and lowland populations. These will be affected by the impacts of global change, including climate change, that will be most distinct in higher altitudes.

Greece is the most mountainous country of the European Union (EU) along with Austria.

According to NORDREGIO (2004) mountainous areas in Greece account for 77.9% of the total country area, while according to the National Statistical Service (2005) the area of the mountainous and semi mountainous municipalities accounts for 71.3%. Mountainous areas are fields of great natural, biological/genetical and cultural wealth, but in their great majority they face numerous environmental and socioeconomic problems. These are mainly abandonment, isolation and population ageing.

The lack of adequate and/or sufficient educational, health, transport and communication infrastructures in combination with the physical isolation of these areas, enhance the aforementioned social problems.

As for practicing agricultural activities, this is very difficult, because of the intense and intensively changing topographic relief, the fragmentation and dispersion of very small land holdings (ownership/use/exploitation units) and the extreme climate conditions prevailing.

In 1975, the European Community announced the first mountain oriented "development" measure, introducing direct income support for farmers in mountainous areas (European Commission 2002).

Since then, important progress has been made not only in dealing, at a theoretical level, with the strategies, policies and measures for the "sustainable" development of mountainous areas, but also in documenting specific critical views (Dax 2004, Rokos 2004, 2010).

The biggest challenge

The development – or maldevelopment - of mountainous areas is a big challenge and requires immediate action. Most important is the definition of the desired future state as a societal consensus, i.e. to answer the question what development do mountain areas as well as their people need.

The fact is that so many years after the “implementation” of the European and national strategies mentioned above, the complicated, multidimensional and interrelated problems of environment and development in mountainous areas, have not been confronted. On the contrary, in many cases, they get even worse.

There are many reasons for this failure. First of all, there is no specific European strategy for the development of mountainous areas which take into consideration the fundamental elements that characterize the specific natural and socioeconomic reality of these areas, even though the voices pointing out the need for a “Green Paper on the Future of the European Mountain Areas” (Euromontana 2007, AEM 2008) are getting stronger.

Key assumptions

If we want to address mountain areas’ development perspectives, caution is required when using terms such as “boosting competitiveness”, “facilitating industry-driven research”, “creating new sources of growth” etc.

A critical analysis of the European strategies, policies and measures for the “sustainable” development in general and especially for the development of mountainous areas, indicates that the main directions for such a development, concerning agriculture and secondly,

tourism, depend exclusively on competitiveness, entrepreneurship, innovation and flexible forms of employment and are in most cases partial, sectorial, segmental and even inappropriate.

The implementation of such policies, even though these policies could have some positive sides for industrial lowland countries and regions, cannot contribute to the revival of the mountainous areas in general and especially of those in extremely mountainous countries like Greece. On the contrary they may deepen the existing social and economical problems of mountainous regions and degrade even more their already sensitive and vulnerable natural, socioeconomic and cultural environment.

Mountain regions are indeed important places for recreation and tourism for an increasingly urbanized Europe. At the same time, they provide important marketed goods and services that are relevant for whole Europe. Being highly vulnerable and cradles of social and cultural diversity, new paradigms are required for the integrated development in mountain regions.

Interdisciplinary, holistic approach

A radically different approach is necessary for mountainous areas. This approach should be based on the concept, values, methods, techniques and procedures of the Worthliving Integrated Development (WID), which has to be simultaneously economic, social, political, cultural and appropriately technical/technological development (Rokos 2003, 2004, 2005, 2010). WID should be always in dialectical harmony and with respect toward human beings and the natural and cultural environment of mountainous areas, in which they behave as their integral part and not as owners, “investors” and exploiters.

What mountain areas need in our opinion, are: integrated, bottom-up policies, local collective initiatives, strengthening of social and indigenous, cultural roots, interdisciplinary approaches.

The technological tools, the methodological and technical steps and the optimal policy practices for the pursuit of the Worth-living Integrated Development include interdisciplinarity and the need for holistic approach, inventory, mapping and systematic monitoring of the elements, features, appearances, phenomena and facts, which constitute the - unique in each case - unity of natural and socio-economic space.

The economic but moreover the social, political and ethical crisis not only in Greece, but also in Europe, as well as all over the world, might be an opportunity for the revival of mountainous areas in an integrated manner, far away from the dominant developmental model that caused all the contemporary social, economic and environmental problems in mountains and in our planet, in general.

Potential areas to support integrated activities

The Work Programme should consist of actions or challenges addressing:

- Revitalization of mountainous areas through bottom-up, local, collective activities (e.g. integrated land consolidation)
- Restoring of jobs potentials through revitalizing traditional crafts and occupations and at the same time utilizing local knowledge, practices and the limited available human resources
- Resetting of abandoned traditional production branches and traditional farming practices. Connection between production and promotion of protected origin quality products with the export sector
- Development of local and regional small and medium size enterprises with the collaboration of local populations and the technical help from relevant research institutions, universities and the private sector in terms of certification, traceability, labeling, advertising, promotion.

The target should be the production of quality products and services with respect towards environment, local cultural, social and humanitarian values, which will give job opportunities to the local population.

The ultimate goal should be the revitalization of mountainous areas. This can happen by identifying, analyzing and investigating the specific problems, real limitations and development possibilities of these areas, with the collaboration of the permanent inhabitants as well as by attracting young, educated, active, responsible people back to mountainous areas in order to promote creative initiatives and ideas, leading to a truly Worthliving Development.

For further documentation and information regarding Integrated Development of Mountain Areas: <http://www.ntua.gr/MIRC/mirc-publications-gb.html> , <http://www.ntua.gr/MIRC/index-gb.html>

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