



**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**



The Metsovion Interdisciplinary Research Center (M.I.R.C.) of the National Technical University of Athens (N.T.U.A.) was founded in 1993 and its principal aim is to contribute to the protection and development of mountainous environment and local European cultures. The activities of N.T.U.A. M.I.R.C are interdisciplinary research for the Protection and Development of Mountainous Environment and Local European Cultures, teaching and provision of continuing education, as well as the conduct of seminars and conferences relevant to the broader object of M.I.R.C., in close cooperation with other Universities, Prefectures and Local Governments, local social groups, cultural, research and productive organizations.

The research group of N.T.U.A. M.I.R.C. has initiated the creation of a database regarding “the mountainous areas of Greece, the protection and development of their local cultures and their interactions and interdependencies with the mountainous environment”, as a contribution to the region’s Worth-Living Integrated Development. This initiative is of particular importance for Greece, since it is one of the two most mountainous countries in Europe (along with Austria) and faces the same problems with all the other mountainous areas.

The first area selected for the launching of the database is the region of Epirus, which is a border region of Greece, with geopolitical importance, since it communicates, has relations and interacts with neighbouring regions, the Balkans and the country’s centre. At the same time Epirus is the most mountainous region in Greece- it constitutes of 67 mountainous municipalities with 444 mountainous municipal or communal departments -, one of the most sparsely populated and one of the poorest regions in the European Union (EU-15) and yet very rich in terms of nature and culture.

This database is a research initiative, via bibliographic and internet sources, which tries to identify the natural and socioeconomic reality, the cultural elements, the traditions, the techniques and craftsmanship, the local environment and biodiversity in every mountainous community of Greece. At the same time, this database is a way to investigate the interactions and interdependencies- and their changes through time-, between the natural and human resources, as well as the problems and needs that occur within these multi-dimensional relationships.

The database includes 25, regularly updated, data-fields for each mountainous community/municipality, such as: altitude, permanent population, historic monuments and museums, traditions and festivals, local products, traditional architecture, mountains, water resources, flora and fauna, biodiversity and protected areas, interactions between environment and local cultures, problems and needs etc.

It is known that Greece is regarded as a biodiversity hotspot in Europe as well as hotspot for endemism in Europe and the Mediterranean region, due to the topography (great mountain chains along the central part and other mountainous bodies). According to the Greek Ministry of Environment, the present rate of Greek biodiversity loss is relatively low, compared to other European countries.

Epirus and Pindos Mountain, in particular, is well known for its high species and ecosystem diversity, for its genetic variability and endemism as well as for the medicinal plants and herbs, noted for their antimicrobial and pharmaceutical properties. There is an obvious need for the protection of Epirus' biodiversity, as a whole, with respect towards human beings and their natural and cultural environment. In this concept, an action plan has been implemented which includes the institution of three successive National Parks, that make up the most extended environmental protection area in Greece, crossing over the biggest part of the mainland (from the borders with Albania, to Pindos Mountain, to Tzoumerka-North Pindos and Grammos Mountain -regions of Kastoria and Ioannina, a distance of, approximately, 150km).

Certain barriers have to be overcome in order to implement this plan properly and effectively. These include, bureaucratic and administrative issues -that cause great delays-, proper coordination of competent authorities and avoidance of political expedience. Essential prerequisites for the Worth-Living Integrated Development of the regions and the protection of their biodiversity are:

- The conduct of a thorough investigation on the geographic distribution of species and the possible changes-losses in biodiversity, due to climate change, land use and other man-made activities,
- The systematic collection, mapping, monitoring, analysis and interpretation of the necessary reliable, diachronic and up-to-date data on the area's natural and socioeconomic reality. In addition to statistical data, these Integrated Surveys of mountainous areas require the use of photointerpretation and remote sensing methods and techniques in a Geographic Information Systems (G.I.S.) environment for the systematic mapping and monitoring of biodiversity,
- The supply of the necessary financing and overall planning and scaling of needs and priorities,
- The provision of experienced and interdisciplinary-trained scientific staff and volunteers,
- The ensuring of state-of-the-art specialized technology-infrastructure and know-how,
- The collaboration with local authorities and relevant national and international bodies,
- The distribution of knowledge and environmental awareness to local populations, students and educators,
- The adoption of a holistic and integrated view regarding the "development" of each area, by taking into account its natural, socioeconomic and cultural advantages, potentials and limitations.

The database is planned to be uploaded at the N.T.U.A. M.I.R.C. website <http://www.ntua.gr/MIRC/> , in Greek.