

11. Conclusions and recommendations

While Europe's mountain areas can be characterised in terms of their topographic specificities, they exhibit great diversity in many aspects and at all scales, with regard to natural conditions, structural diversity, urbanisation, socio-economic trends, policy implementation. Beyond national policies, the need for a European mountain policy is not unequivocal in spite of previous initiatives, such as the Charter for European Mountain Areas developed and discussed in the Council of Europe during the 1990s, and proposals developed to a greater or lesser extent, for instance in the following documents:

- a policy for upland areas (Economic and Social Committee, 1988);
- l'avenir de la politique de la montagne dans le cadre de l'Union européenne (FNSEA and SCH, 1996);
- recommendations of the European Inter-governmental Consultation on Sustainable Mountain Development (Backmeroff et al., 1997);
- vers une politique européenne des montagnes: problèmes, impact de mesures et adaptations nécessaires (ICALPE, 1997);
- report on a new strategy of mountain regions (Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, 1998);
- report on 25 years' application of Community legislation for hill and mountain farming (Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, 2001)
- opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the future of upland areas in the EU (Economic and Social Committee, 2002);
- rapport sur les régions structurellement défavorisées (îles, régions de montagne, régions à faible densité de population) dans le cadre de la politique de cohésion et de ses perspectives institutionnelles (Pomés Ruiz, 2003);
- projet de rapport du Comité des régions sur "L'action communautaire en faveur des zones de montagne" (Borghi, 2003).

Everywhere, even in countries which have given attention to mountain areas for some decades, mountain policies compete with policies for sparsely-populated areas, rural policy, and regional policy, particularly in middle mountains. The special attention given to mountain areas in regulations deriving from the CAP is difficult to transfer to development as a whole.

11.1 Mountain specificities in the future European context

The analyses presented throughout this report, and brought together in the three typologies developed in Chapter 10, show great diversity within and between Europe's mountain areas. Differences between countries are important; there are many between present EU Member States, Norway, and Switzerland on the one hand; and the acceding countries on the other. In many countries, there are also significant differences between mountain municipalities and other municipalities. Yet even more striking is the diversity of socio-economic situations within massifs. Nevertheless, this study has clearly revealed the lack of available quantitative data at a sufficiently fine spatial resolution for many key themes, particularly those relating to mountain economies. Consequently, many general trends could only be described in qualitative terms, based principally on the national reports.

The mountain regions of the study area have specific geographical handicaps as well as more structural challenges. The natural handicaps include those that have been used to delineate them in this study, and many are located in the periphery of their countries (and often also in Europe). These characteristics are of a permanent nature, and the challenge is to deal with the situation and to make use of it to strengthen competitiveness. Other challenges are of a more structural nature. The social dimension, with depopulation and poverty in many rural and peripheral regions, is important here. There are also on-going structural changes in many regions: in particular, those with high dependence on small-scale agriculture, manufacturing, and the exploitation of minerals face significant challenges. Here, the issue is to find a new equilibrium and to develop new economic strengths.

Three main challenges for mountain areas should be seen in the light of current globalisation processes:

- the trend to turn mountain areas into ‘open museums’ or areas for recreation and protected nature for industrialised societies;
- the trend to see mountain areas as regions to be economically exploited, or even over-exploited;
- the trend of abandonment.

These challenges contradict each other - and this underlines the variety of challenges for any particular mountain area, depending on its location, assets, and constraints.

11.2 Priority aims

The transversal analysis of the national reports underlined some key issues that were discussed in a workshop involving all national experts. The exchange of concrete examples and ideas allowed a better understanding of European situations, diversity and policies and the possibility of making some recommendations targeted to all action levels. Seven topics emerged.

A focus of mountain agriculture on quality products and land preservation

Very diverse situations can be encountered in European mountain agriculture in terms of land use (Chapter 4) and economic structures. Except for large farms of collective or latifundium systems, farms are small-scale and fragmented. Agriculture frequently suffers from a double handicap, with both a difficult natural context (handicap of the slopes and climate) and structural weaknesses. In general, mountain agriculture cannot compete with lowland agriculture. However, the maintenance of mountain agriculture is important to preserve landscapes, recreational opportunities, and cultural identity – and is a social necessity in some countries where it is a subsistence activity, often on the way to abandonment.

In EU Member States, agricultural incomes in mountains are maintained by the grants deriving from the Less Favoured Areas policy, but this is not the case in the acceding countries. With very few exceptions, mountain agriculture cannot hope to become competitive in adopting intensive models in the growing global competition. Farmers have to compensate for these handicaps by focusing on the production, processing, and marketing of quality products and/or niche markets (e.g., organic food, labelling), promoted when possible through their links of the attractiveness to tourists and other

consumers. Such initiatives are being developed in a large number of local programmes, in both Member States and acceding countries, but often with inadequate resources or coordination.

Agricultural policies in mountains have to be more specially targeted on this kind of area-based farming, complemented by the public protection of labels of origin, and sustaining links with other activities through multi-activity (forestry, hunting, tourism, small industries).

Recognition of the full values of mountain forests

Forests cover a significant proportion of most of Europe's mountain areas (Chapter 4), but forestry is often unprofitable due particularly to more complex management with difficult harvesting, more expensive transportation costs, and the stagnation of timber prices. Know-how is becoming less and less available, and training does not provide the number of workers needed in the first stage of manufacturing. At the same time, forest products may have new roles to play within mountain economies, with regard to both the processing and marketing of quality products (e.g., furniture, mushrooms) and as sources of renewable energy, especially for remote communities. Forests are also key areas for recreation and the conservation of biological diversity, with both economic and non-economic values.

Policies have to facilitate the coordination of the protection, production, recreation, and environmental functions of mountain forests. They also need to recognise that forests and areas used for agriculture are part of the same landscape, owned and used by the same people, and visited by the same tourists.

The transition for manufacturing activities in mountain areas

Manufacturing activities in mountain areas have traditionally been implemented around sources of energy and mineral resources, or been based on specific local know-how developed through agricultural pluri-activity. The secondary sector generally provides more employment than the primary sector (Chapter 6). These factors of implementation are being challenged by technological evolution and international competition. Thus, the major trend is a decline of traditional manufacturing, decreasing labour forces, and out-migration. Four approaches should be explored:

- industrial markets favoured (or not handicapped) by mountain location: e.g., activities based on new technologies, ICT, winter tourism and sport manufacturing, food and wood processing;
- the attractiveness of mountain environment and quality of life for new entrepreneurs;
- the reutilisation of former industrial buildings for new businesses;
- the transformation of the historical and architecture features of old industrial infrastructure into tourist attractions or facilities.

All these issues suppose a more consistent policy toward manufacturing activities in mountains, including more adapted training opportunities, assistance in developing proposals and projects, financial support, and access to credit.

Enhancement of mountain tourism

Tourism constitutes an exceptionally attractive economic activity in many mountain areas and can generate substantial incomes, so the development of this sector is the dream of many mountain public or private actors. However, mass tourism is restricted to a limited number of areas, with massive infrastructure and major investments, in an increasingly competitive market. In other areas, tourism should not be developed beyond hiking with a minimal infrastructure (trails, minimal accommodation facilities) involving trained professionals.

One main characteristic of mountain tourism is its seasonality, with high seasons in winter, summer, or both, with specific types of employment, much of which is low-paid. Mountain tourism is a highly differentiated industry, with diverse markets focussing on domestic or international visitors and on an immense range of winter and/or summer activities which go in and out of fashion. Consequently, tourism policy should be adapted to local resources and combined in regional development strategies within overall economies. Furthermore, climate change may have significant impacts both on key tourism resources, such as winter snow and glaciers for skiing, and on the landscapes that are the backdrop to many activities and attractions in their own right. Tourism development holds great opportunities, but illustrates the contradictions between economic viability and ecological preservation in mountain areas.

Tourism and recreation policies are often not defined as one separate policy area, and responsibilities for policies of importance for tourism development are often divided between several ministries and public authorities. Tourism development calls for coordination between policy sectors. Particularly, agro-tourism is only one sub-sector of this diverse industry, which emphasises the need to enlarge the opportunities for rural policies to see beyond the agricultural sector.

Reduction of the barrier effects of mountains

Many massifs correspond to national or regional borders. In some cases, they reinforce the effect of administrative borders or make links between each side difficult. Major infrastructures built to compensate for these difficulties have often had negative environmental impacts.

The Alps are atypical in that they are, to a large extent, an integral part of the European core. The evolution of most other mountain areas largely depends on their accessibility from major agglomerations in the lowlands, especially adjacent transition zones, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 7. In order to reduce isolation and increase exchanges within massifs, high priority has to be given to new technology infrastructures and networks, which is a specific challenge as responsibilities for services of general economic interest are increasingly at least partly privatised. Networking between various players (institutions, communities, enterprises) in cross-border co-operation at different levels, within as well as between countries, is a crucial point.

Development of urban functions and urban networks in mountain areas

Mountains are not only rural areas; many mountain people live in urban centres which, both within the mountains and in their transition zones, play key roles in their development (e.g., employment, links between territories and services). However, most urban centres within the mountains are small in size. Urban networks in mountain areas have specific characteristics, due to the dominant position that cities often have within the valleys that constitute their hinterland. Furthermore, traditional divisions of tasks between cities at different levels in the urban hierarchy cannot be applied in many mountain areas, because of the difficulty of accessing higher-rank cities. Finally, the economic basis of many mountain cities is based on a restricted scope of activities with inadequate infrastructure, and is therefore fragile.

As shown in Chapter 3, areas close to mountain regions are among the most densely populated in Europe. Therefore, urban policies for mountain regions largely have to address mountain-lowland interactions. As distances from the core parts of mountain regions to cities outside mountain areas can be very large and accessibility is often poor, as shown in Chapter 7, urban policy at a lower level is also necessary. Mountain policies therefore have to reinforce their links with urban planning, economic investments in small towns, local infrastructure networks and integrated actions between rural and urban issues.

Promotion of sustainable development

More than in any other environment, development policies in mountain areas presuppose compromises between different sustainability objectives. How can major infrastructure investments, which are necessary to prevent economic regression and depopulation, be defended from an environmental point of view? How can economic activities be modernised without exacerbating trends of depopulation? How can the attractiveness of some massifs for permanent residence or second homes be extended without damaging landscapes? How can resources be exploited, without jeopardizing their long-term conservation?

For all these questions there are currently no clear answers, so pilot projects and the exchange and analysis of good – and bad – practice are essential.

11.3 Levels of modalities for future EU and national action

This study has proposed a common delineation of mountain municipalities for the countries of the study area. Nevertheless, this is not a definition for immediate use in policy implementation or to define eligibility for specific interventions; it has been made for the purpose of analysis only - to investigate whether there are systematic differences between mountain municipalities and other municipalities, and between mountain massifs in different parts of Europe. A particular recommendation that can be made to individual states is to compare this delineation with national delineations, building on the work presented in Chapter 3 and 8.

The analysis of European mountain municipalities and massifs presented in this report shows great diversity at all scales. Very few large-scale patterns are apparent; complexity is the norm. National borders play significant roles. There are often

significant differences between municipalities within massifs, and also within countries. Even if there is a clear recognition of the European dimension of mountain regions and expectations from mountain actors, the need for an EU policy specifically directed to mountain areas and distinct from other structural policies is not unequivocal. At least three reasons can be cited: the great diversity and complexity of situations, the principle of subsidiarity, and the fact that most mountain regions are within areas where EU structural and agricultural policies already apply, or will do after enlargement.

The structural problems of the mountains, as far as they exist, can generally be addressed through the classical objectives of regional policies. One issue to be defined is the likely extent to which mountains are included in territorial objectives after 2006. Currently, the higher ‘fragile’ mountains are well covered, but many middle mountains are in phasing out areas. This applies to the current EU Member States; new decisions will have to be made for the acceding countries.

However, mountainous areas do have specific challenges. These are sometimes recognised in present policies but often are not. Stakeholders from mountain regions have similar problems to stakeholders from other kinds of regions (urban, rural, peripheral, etc), as regional development efforts are often constrained by the sectoral division of all aspects of societies, at national as well as EU level. Mountain actors often call for better co-ordination between sectoral policies, whether with co-funding from the EU or not. For this purpose, the programming approach of the Structural Funds is particularly relevant with its emphasis on analysis of a region’s challenges; consistency in the formulation of policy goals, priorities and measures; multi-annual implementation of measures co-funded by private, public and EU bodies; and monitoring and evaluation.

Co-ordinated mountain policies will have to involve a large number of different sectors, and will therefore first and foremost remain a national responsibility. Any future EU mountain policy must respect the principle of subsidiarity. There is an on-going discussion on instruments for regional development policy after enlargement of the EU. An opportunity frequently discussed is the possibility of introducing ‘natural handicaps’ as one of several possible strands for implementation of future Structural Funds interventions under Objective 1 as well as under Objective 2. The results of the present study, particularly the typologies presented in Chapter 10, can be used to identify regions where this may be particularly appropriate.

The study has also revealed a significant variety in national approaches to mountain issues. A general observation is that there will be much to gain from international comparative studies of the implementation of policies and measures. Both central and regional governments should use the opportunity to gain from experiences elsewhere.

Systematic dissemination of experiences between regions and countries can also be enhanced in the case of specific national and European measures for mountain regions. One specific opportunity here is to establish something like to the present Interact programme to build strong networks between regions working with similar challenges and instruments.

11.4 Emphases for policy and research

The CAP is, and will remain, important for mountain regions. In the future, support for mountain agriculture should not lead towards intensification or ‘lowland models’ with which it will never be able to compete. The primary goal should be to encourage systems that give added value to its specificities – e.g., quality products, responses to the demands of tourists, conservation of biodiversity – and which take into consideration the entire process of production, processing, and marketing. In this context, countries should particularly consider mountain regions when developing the second pillar of the CAP, addressing agriculture in the broader context of multi-functional regional economies.

Mountain forests are important both in terms of area and with regard to their expansion onto former agricultural land, and should be considered in better-targeted measures. These should especially address the multi-functional management of the forests, including their non-market values such as conservation and recreation; and also better consider the need for managing forests in the context of the wider landscape.

A key principle should be to encourage multi-sectoral approaches and pluri-activity involving various economic activities – not only agriculture and tourism. A first step in this context should be the collection of data on pluri-activity, preferably at the European scale. Diverse approaches to tourism should be adopted, rather than transferring a single model – e.g., mass tourism or agro-tourism – and should be adapted to local conditions in terms of natural resources. Thus, for example, biodiversity could gain added value. Equally, where manufacturing is in decline, advantage should be taken of the cultural heritage and infrastructure, and new opportunities based on the advantages of mountain areas should be developed.

Even though they are important, the reduction of isolation, and improvements in accessibility, should not be considered solely in terms of transport infrastructure. Information and communications technologies (ICT) can play key roles in providing new opportunities for business, education and training in mountain areas and for the development of tele-working; today, mountains are often the last areas to be provided with ICT services.

It is necessary to increase our knowledge of mountain regions through support for research. One key element should include the establishment of a network of mountain research and training centres to facilitate exchange and better harmonisation of both methodologies and knowledge. However, as this study has shown, there is also an urgent need for more consistent, disaggregated data collection, especially of employment and economic data, to allow the definition of current conditions and the evaluation of future trends, as key inputs to policy making and evaluation. The typologies presented in Chapter 10 are a first step in this direction, but can only point the way to future work, for instance on the interactions of demographic processes, accessibility to services and infrastructure, and economic development. It is, however, probably unrealistic to expect that many more types of data will become available at the level of detail pursued in this study. Consequently, there is a need for the synthesis of existing studies, for instance of the additional costs of location in

mountain areas, the uses and benefits of ICT, and the outcomes of the many LEADER projects in mountain areas.

The training of stakeholders is also a key area for further action, and not only in the agricultural sector. This includes training entrepreneurs, often multi-functional, with respect to all aspects of their business; as well as training for specific mountain professions, such as mountain guides.

Finding a balance between the objectives of development and preservation is often at the heart of local debates and should be resolved according to the three principles of sustainable development. This should be adapted to the specific situation of acceding countries in which serious social and economic problems in mountain areas exist. Europe-wide networks and structures with an emphasis on mountain issues will have key roles to play, especially with regard to sharing knowledge and experience developed in the current EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland, on one hand, and the acceding countries, on the other.

In all these fields, the main challenge is enlargement, with the addition of many mountain areas with more fragile economies and more limited human and financial resources to develop their resources according to the model of the current EU Member States. Nevertheless, the contrasts of situations at all scales implies a clear need for the development and implementation of informed and appropriate policies which recognise the specificities of each of Europe's very diverse mountain areas.