EU CAP Network Focus Group

'Competitive and resilient mountain areas'

Mini Paper 1

Good governance for managing sustainability and resilience in mountain areas

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Introduction

The primary objective of this Mini Paper is to address key issues related to mountain governance, specifically focusing on the requirements for good governance, such as soft skills, knowledge, innovative solutions, and the necessary resources. **The central theme revolves around a community-oriented governance approach, establishing a framework for proactive stakeholder involvement and sustainable conflict management.** The primary audience for the Mini Paper comprises practitioners, communities, businesses, etc., aiming to provide them with potential solutions for enhancing their inclusion in the decision-making process.

Structured in a logical flow, the Mini Paper aims to provide relevant information on successful practices in European mountain governance. Beginning withB their specific contextual details, objectives, and evolutionary paths, these practices are thoroughly analysed based on the aforementioned essential elements. The intention is to extract specific experiences and derive valuable lessons, assessing both the potential and limitations for their replication across diverse geographical areas.

The involvement of the community, or the so-called bottom-up method, was considered to be the most delicate factor influencing governance and sustainability in the mountainous environment. Based on this criterion, the six study cases have been arranged hierarchically, with the study case that is more pertinent to the community being approached last.

The variety of the selected case studies, which include a range of geographic, socioeconomic, and environmental situations, makes it possible to conduct a thorough analysis of governance approaches designed for particular mountainous regions. Adaptive management approaches, technology-driven solutions, and cooperative decision-making procedures involving stakeholders and local communities are all examples of this.

The Mini Paper highlights the key areas in need of investigation and suggests relevant concepts for upcoming breakthroughs in order to support these claims even more. The goal of this all-encompassing strategy is to support continued research and development of efficient mountain governance techniques.

Case studies

1. Romania: Mountain Law for the 're-organisation' of mountain area governance

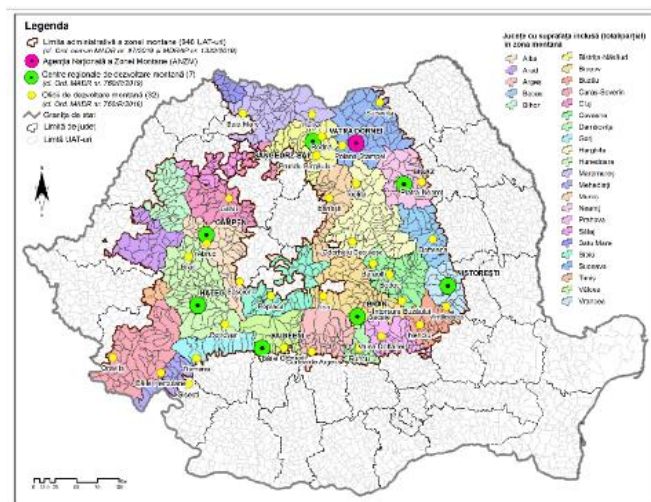*Sustainable and inclusive development of the Romanian mountain area*

https://azm.gov.ro/

Figure 1: Territory of the Mountain Law

Context. Romanian mountain areas face particular challenges for effective governance due to their geographic complexities, frequent status as commons, susceptibility to demographic and environmental change, and the impacts of external political and socioeconomic processes. One specific action to address these challenges is the 2018 Mountain Law.

Territorial scale. According to the Mountain Law, mountain areas in Romania cover a total of 91,336 km^2 (38.3% of national territory) and encompass 4.8 million people (approx. 25% of total population).

Objective. The goal of the Mountain Law is the sustainable and inclusive development of the Romanian mountain area. One specific feature of the strategic approach promoted in the Mountain Law is the 're-organisation' of mountain area governance at the level of 9 *"mountain groups (massifs)"* – each of which form a single distinct geographic, economic and social entity sharing similar characteristics.

Origin and evolution. The 2018 Mountain Law in Romanian is inspired by the 1985 Mountain Law of France which introduced the concept of decentralizing and differentiating mountain policies based on recognition that mountain massifs are separate territorial units with specific needs and unique characteristics.

Form of governance. A key feature of the 2018 Mountain Law is the establishment of a Massif Committee for each of the 9 mountain massifs to advise on the implementation of policies and strategies for the development and protection of the mountain economy and environment. Each Massif Committee is represented in a national government consultation body – the National Mountain Council - which is established under the office of the Prime Minister and mandated to liaise with other relevant Ministries and government agencies as necessary.

Community participation. The 2018 Mountain Law does not include any specific provision to enhance community participation – either directly or indirectly - in the governance of mountain areas in Romania. This is a significant weakness of the current legislation and consideration should be given to updating the Mountain Law (as recently done in France).

Conflict management. There is no specific provision in the 2018 Mountain Law and/or associated governance structures for conflict management.

Competencies necessary for good governance. The Mountain Law 2018 acknowledges the importance of developing the competencies of all public officials with responsibilities for executive decision-making, administration and advisory roles in mountain area development. The Law advocates participation in regular training / specialisation/refresher courses provided by the National Agency for Mountain Areas.

Governance for resilience and competitiveness. A major challenge facing the Romanian government has been HOW EXACTLY to operationalise the ambitions of the 2018 Mountain Law and to transpose its policy objectives into practical action. In 2022, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development initiated (with support of the World Bank and European Social Fund) the preparation of a new Integrated Development Strategy for the Mountain Areas that aimed to significantly expand the current level of support to mountain areas development and to increase its effectiveness. All related documents can be found here: https://www.madr.ro/proiecte-cu-finantare-nerambursabila/proiect-poca-zona-montana.html

2. Portugal: Barroso Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems – GIAHS

A mean to preserve and develop agricultural landscapes in mountain areas

https://www.fao.org/giahs/giahsaroundtheworld/designated-sites/europe-and-central-asia/barroso-agro-slyvo-pastoral-system/detailed-information/en

Context. In numerous regions, ingenious traditional agricultural systems still survive, ensuring food and livelihood security, agrobiodiversity, local and traditional knowledge systems, cultures, value systems and social organizations knowledge, and landscape features. To preserve this unique living landscapes and to ensure the presence and living of the communities still there, Unites Nation Organisation (ONU) have recognized them as GIAHS.

Figure 2: Territory of Barroso GIAHS

Territorial scale. Applied to different scales, these areas represent recognized traditional agricultural landscapes, that might be at the village level (e.g. complex multi-layered home gardens) to a regional level (e.g. mountain rice terrace agroecosystems) or a system level (e.g. Hunting-gathering systems). They should contribute to the provision of local food security, while preserving high levels of agro-biodiversity, storing of traditional knowledge and ingenuity of management systems, ensure socio-cultural functions, diversity and aesthetic values.

Objective. Raise awareness and value the resources of these remarkable land use systems and landscapes with the local communities, integrating local production and non-production (e.g. tourism) and ensure technical advice and support.

Origin and evolution. In 2002, FAO presented a Global Partnership Initiative for the conservation and adaptive management of GIAHS. Since 2005, 86 systems in 26 countries where recognized as agricultural heritage sites. In Europe, six (of ten) GIAHS are located in mountain areas (The subalpine pastures of Andorra, Traditional Hay milk Farming in the Austrian Alpine Arc - Austria, Agrosilvopastoral system Mountains of León – Spain, Barroso Agro-sylvo-pastoral System – Portugal, Malaga Raisin Production System in La Axarquía – Spain, Olive Groves of the Slopes between Assisi and Spoleto, Italy). The territory of Barroso was a classified as a GIAHS in April 2018.

Form of governance. The governance structure includes local development associations, municipality, farmers associations, civil society. It may also include outside actors, related with the academia, tourism, agricultural local or national departments. These public and private stakeholders must work together, as a committee, since the preparation of the application, listening and including the concerns of local communities, based on the idea of an "adaptive management".

Community participation. Traditional and family farming communities living in and around the GIAHS are the primary actors to involve. Local and national support should contribute to strengthen socio-political (governance) and economic processes (eco-tourism, niche markets, off-farm income, etc.) that help the farmers to address the main challenges and to make the most of the contemporary opportunities at the same time they maintain the agro-ecosystem goods and services.

Conflict management. An executive and monitoring committee, including representants of the private and public stakeholders involved, should be previewed, to deal with conflicts, to monitor and evaluate the proposed action plan, and to keep the action plan dynamic.

Competencies necessary for good governance. Multi-stakeholders' governance, territorial diagnosis, GIAHS guidelines, dynamic conservation, tourism and the support to the criteria for the recognition (food and livelihood security, agro-biodiversity, traditional knowledge systems, cultures and value system, landscape).

Governance for resilience and competitiveness. GIAHS work as agriculture-based territorial development instrument, that contributes to the resilience of unique agrifood systems respecting their landscapes, traditions, crops and agricultural practices, creating local dynamics that are an answer to contradictory mountain territories ageing, lack of generational succession, land abandonment, lack of financial resources, migration and climate change related challenges. The system meets the requirements of sustainability, proximity, and governance demanded by territorialized systems.

3. Spain: Camin de la Mesa LAG in Asturias region

Assuring a very complete vision of the whole area

https://www.caminrealdelamesa.es/

Context. That area is called Camin Real de la Mesa, where most of the territory is high altitude mountain area. As a particularity, the Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Asturias have many competences as they manage not only diversification aids, but also those of the primary sector and those directed to councils and associations, which allows them to have a holistic and integral vision of the territory.

Territorial scale. The size of this Camin Real LAG makes it possible to include different mountain territories under the same structure, from medium and low mountain areas to areas that can be considered high mountain areas. Prospecting on defined territorial scales, which often do not correspond to administrative barriers or borders, especially in mountain areas, is key to good governance and the social and territorial dimension of this LAG is very balanced.

Objective. The objective of this structure is twofold: The first one, to jointly manage certain funds and programmes for territorial development and, on the second, to generate a meeting point between the Public Administrations, non-profit organisations, the primary sector and entrepreneurs. Here we have one of the peculiarities of this case, the governing bodies are composed of different sectors, groups and institutions, in terms of equality, which facilitates a very complete vision of the whole area.

Asturias LAGs

Municipalities in Camin Real de la Mesa LAG

Asturias Region in Spain

Origin and evolution. Camin Real de la Mesa LAG began 25 years ago to manage exclusively the LEADER programme for its territory, but over the years it has evolved and now manages different programmes of European or state funds, as well as development cooperation projects. As it has gained credibility and increased its partnership, its functions have grown, as have its competences.

Form of governance. In order to ensure proper governance and a balanced representation, at territorial and sectoral level, in the decision-making bodies, internal rules are established to guarantee rotation and balanced representation. In this way, the associations (professional, agrarian, youth, women, sports, tourism etc.) are classified by typology and a representative from each of them is elected to be present in the General Assembly. Furthermore, there cannot be repeated representatives from any of the municipalities included in Camín Real LAG.

Community participation. Although any group can be part of the LAG, participation in its decision-making bodies is subject to the criteria of representativeness and territorial balance. The participation of the community is organised through collectives that represent them, for example, the

interests of citizens are represented by neighbourhood associations, those of businessmen by professional and business associations, those of farmers and stockbreeders by trade unions or professional associations or those of sportsmen by their various clubs.

Conflict management. LAG structure makes it easy to resolve conflicts, as the groups that make it up perfectly represent the socio-economic context. This is one of the virtues of this LAG, which, having a difficult mountainous area, has been able to bring together key groups for its development, such as agricultural producers' associations, neighbourhood associations and business associations.

Competencies necessary for good governance. The complex social context of mountain territories, due to orographic and cultural reasons are sometimes sociologically complex too, very closed and endemic, so it requires new and open structures such as the LAGs. In such a case, it has served to share the interests of high mountain municipalities, such as Somiedo, with others in the lower areas of the valleys, such as Grado. Historical prejudices and barriers are broken down in favour of common work.

Governance for resilience and competitiveness. The way of working of this LAG is reflected in a project that it has developed in cooperation with other Asturian LAGs and that tries to tackle one of the main problems of this mountain area, which is depopulation. Through the cooperation project called Nuevos Pobladores, families from other countries will be brought here, taking advantage of the experience of the LAG Camín Real de la Mesa in International Cooperation and its close collaboration with Honduras, to whom accommodation will be provided in houses ceded and repaired by the Town Councils, so that they can work in companies with unmet labour demand, belonging to the professional and business associations members of the LAG.

4. Effective Governance on Ireland's Upland Commonages

Modernise management practices for sustainable outcomes

Figure 3: Context of Irish Upland's commonages
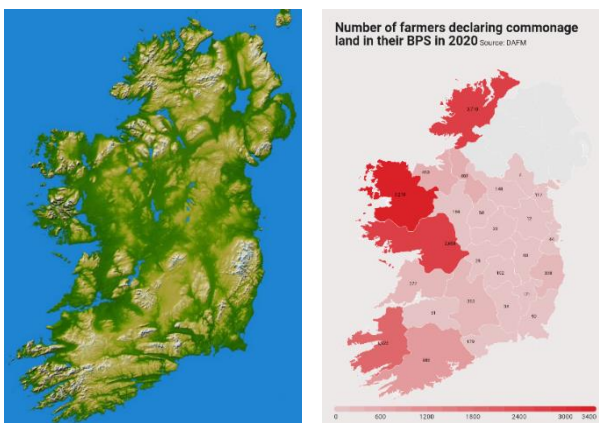
Context. Ireland's uplands feature state or privately-owned commonages where grazing, regulated by specified livestock units over a continuous period, is the predominant activity. Governance structures among shareholders and across commonages are absent, with management conducted individually.

Territorial Scale. Approximately 420,000 hectares of land across 4,500 commonages are farmed by around 15,000 farmers, mainly concentrated on the western seaboard.

Objective. The objective is to establish effective governance institutions and modernise management practices for sustainable outcomes. Without this shift, declining environmental, economic and social conditions may lead to heightened anger, conflict and inequality among shareholders and users. Effective governance

fosters a structured and fair environment for meeting stakeholders' needs and delivering sustainable land management practices.

Origin and Evolution. Originating from a combination of colonial legacy, Irish land reform, and successive land use policies under the Common Agricultural Policy, individual management has led to overgrazing, dormancy, and degradation of natural resources.

Form of Governance. The current reliance on individual land management practices for governing common lands is inadequate. The SUAS EIP Project[1] addressed governance by setting up constitutions for participating commonages.

Community Involvement. There are no provisions for community involvement on state or privately-owned commonages.

Conflict Management. There are no mechanisms for conflict management on privately-owned commonages. State-owned commonages have institutional arrangements for conflict management.

Competencies necessary for good governance. Government departments, shareholders, and stakeholders must embrace communal resource management to establish agile, interconnected governance mechanisms.

Governance for resilience and competitiveness. This includes adopting participatory research and implementation methods and innovative land use science. Transitioning from livestock units and fixed grazing periods to regenerative practices, including the reintroduction of transhumance, is essential for positive environmental and economic outcomes.

5. The new concept 'Smart Villages' – opportunities and challenges for mountain regions in Bulgaria

Creating a network of stakeholders to support measures at national level

https://www.smartrural27.eu

Figure 4: Smart Villages across Europe
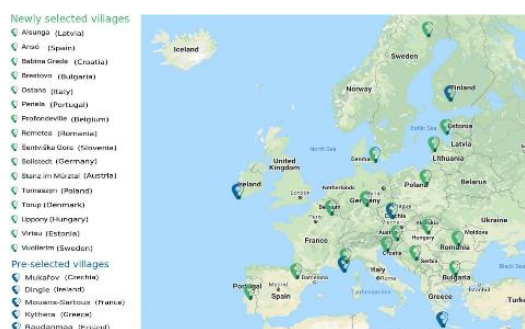
Context. The concept of "Smart Villages" (in a narrow sense) implies the development of an ecosystem consisting of different elements to improve the quality of community life and rural environment, in which various stakeholders such as state and public institutions, business organizations, scientific circles and representatives of rural communities participate.

Territorial scale. In principle, the concept of Smart Villages includes communities in rural areas consisting of one or more settlements, without any restrictions regarding administrative boundaries or the number of inhabitants.

Objective. The main goal is to examine in addition the various opportunities and instruments to support the implementation and development of the concept of "Smart Villages" in mountain regions through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural

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[1] https://suaseipproject.ie/

Development and the Cohesion Fund of the EU, as well as the possibility of creating a network of stakeholders and support measures at national level.

Origin and evaluation. Currently, the concept "Smart Villages" is new and relatively unknown among the main stakeholders in its implementation in Bulgaria. However, its introduction and implementation in rural areas in Bulgaria would be useful and definitely necessary. This would lead to the development of a new type of rural development policy and the addition of different value and effect to the other approaches available to their territorial development.

Form of governance. Effective policies in rural areas include the engagement of a wide array of actors and multi-level governance mechanisms. This requires the cooperation and commitment of government at multiple levels, and the involvement of the private sector and the third sector. Capacity building is at the heart of the implementation of rural policy. Long-term capacity building makes rural communities more engaged in development processes and more resilient to shocks.

Community participation. Participatory approach (participative approach) means active involvement of the local community in the drafting and decision-making regarding development strategies for "smart villages".

Conflict management. An effective management structure is vital to a successful smart village initiative. The process can be initiated through existing structures, but can also be managed by a group of active residents. It must be open and inclusive, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that all voices are heard in strategic decision-making. Organisations which are being set up in rural areas, such as associations and local clubs, must be seen as multipliers, especially if the projects are aimed at social innovation and voluntary activities.

Competencies necessary for good governance. It is important to preserve the competences of rural regions and to stabilise the governance networks created to ensure their long-term survival through flexible support so as not to lose their financial and decision-making autonomy. It is also essential to preserve, expand and strengthen local government assets to promote local entrepreneurship.

Governance for resilience and competitiveness. Realisation of integrated locally oriented approaches - a potential opportunity for a strategic, integrated approach is the emerging concept of smart villages. This approach is aimed at integrating policy actions aimed at rural development, the environment, regional and urban development, transport and connectivity.

6. ROMANIA: EcoMuseum of Apuseni Mountains (Transylvania)

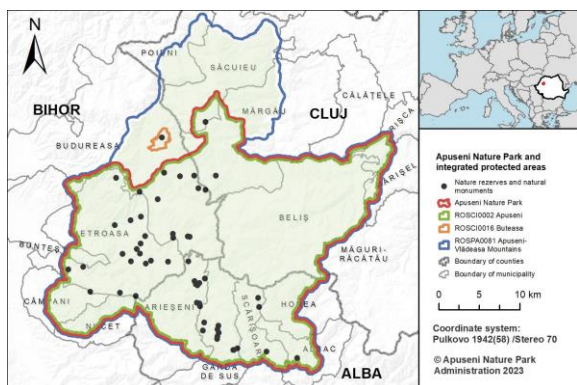### *Preserving the identity and ensuring the resilience of local community*

www.ecomuzeultariimotilor.ro

Context. External financial support, mostly in the form of grants, have generated in the last three decades numerous and not-correlated projects in support of the development of local communities, primarily aiming to reduce the socio-cultural and economic gap with other neighbouring areas.

Territorial scale. The initiative started on the territorial administrative units (UAT) on the surface of the Apuseni Natural Park. The park was declared as Natura 2000 sites, and only that area can be accepted as part of the Ecomuseum.

Figure 5: Apuseni Natural Park and integrated protected areas

Objective. General purpose or objective is to preserve the identity and ensuring the resilience of local communities.

Origin and evolution. The socio-economic transformations occurred last three decades that are no longer favourable to maintaining a sustainable evolution of the socio-ecological complex, lead mainly to the abandonment of land, gentrification with an emphasis on the deterioration of the traditional local landscape and the loss of the capacity to generate local products necessary for the regional economy or nationally.

Form of governance. The bottom-up approach involves the association of all local actors, legal entities, whose declared object of activity is compatible with the purpose and objectives of the ecomuseum. The establishment of the ecomuseum will be certified by the signing of a letter by the Administration of the Apuseni Natural Park and the communes that agree to join the ecomuseum by adopting a decision of the local council in this regard. The process of accession of other communes to the ecomuseum remains open on the condition that the new resulting territory remains in a unitary form, without divisions or insular forms.

Community participation. The ecomuseum is created together with local communities and is managed through the direct involvement of the population, the inhabitants of the area. All the activities of the ecomuseum will be carried out through the direct involvement of local communities.

Conflict management. The Ecomuseum will have its own regulation, which will complement the current legislative framework that is applicable in this territory. When the problems are generated inside the ecomuseum, they will be managed by its own management structure, and when they are generated from outside, the legal way of resolving disputes will be used.

Competencies necessary for good governance. The entities involved in the management of the ecomuseum territory will contribute with their own human, informational, material and financial resources within the limits of legal competence and resource allocation, based on the plans and commitments assumed. Also, the management structure will provide staff with specialized training in the realization, coordination and/or management of specific programs, strategies, plans and activities.

Governance for resilience and competitiveness. Ensuring the resilience of local communities is the goal of the ecomuseum. Because the ecomuseum will largely overlap with the territory of a natural park, the management of the ecomuseum will be ensured through the collaboration between the park administration, local public administrations and the local population.

Lessons learned

Studying governance cases provided valuable insights into both good and bad practices in how organizations are managed and governed, as the table below demonstrates.

Good practices	Bad practices
Bottom-up approach. The implementation of an innovative governance form and the monitoring process cannot depend only on a top-down mechanism but has to be combined with the bottom-up participation. Creating the space for stakeholders to meet and shape decisions around the use and common management has been a very positive move. Comprising of critical resources and providing easy access to stakeholders on the ground is the key to the success. **Participatory approach.** The decision process is based on the consultation of any relevant and interested stakeholders (mainly locals), not only on external – political, scientifical, academic etc. This approach strengthens the links between the administrations, institutions, and stakeholders and between these and the outside. In time, the networks become denser, and the system may afford with the internationalisation that derives from the recognition and inclusion in a wider network. **Flexibility.** The innovative form of governance (e.g., rotates between the representatives of the main stakeholders) lead to the enhancement of the concept of local leadership as well as that of solidarity. **Local adaptability.** The territorial dimension is not necessary overlapping the region and larger or the municipality, but on social, cultural and economic realities, being adequate to implement integrated decisions. It proved to be critical to have an up-to-date understanding on the condition of the physical environment on commonages.	**Lack of predictability**. This is a direct result of the involved stakeholders' vision on strategic development of the entire area, even if the cooperation between relevant actors is encouraged and supported. **Overstressing a sector of activity**. In many cases, agriculture is viewed as the primary or sole driver for maintaining these territories. However, concerns arise regarding the sustainability of these business models and their compatibility with production systems, which may jeopardize the survival of unique agricultural and landscape systems, particularly when confronted with extensive infrastructure development for new activities such as tourism **False leadership.** In some cases, the risk of a leader that monopolizes decision-making and proposals may appear. **Spatially inhomogeneous structures.** This proved to be a common mistake by artificially structures covering areas that do not represent the socioeconomic, physical and cultural reality of the territory, generating imbalances that reduce effectiveness and operability. **Ignoring the diversity of types**. A one-size-fits-all approach to governance does not deliver good results.

Traditions and landscape conservations. Thus, ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources and maintaining the resilience of ecosystems as essential conditions in landscape conservation will be directly reflected in ensuring and maintaining the resilience of local communities as part of a socio-ecological system at the level of the entire territory. That contributes to the resilience of unique agrifood systems respecting their landscapes, traditions, crops and agricultural practices, and population, even when facing ageing, lack of generational succession, land abandonment, lack of financial resources, migration and other climate changes effects. The system meets the requirements of sustainability, proximity, and governance demanded by territorialised systems.

Potential of replicability. The development of common understandable concepts, mechanisms with functional and beneficial results for the local socio-economic development will be able to be later extended at the request of other local communities and in neighbouring areas, which will argue for the identification of viable solutions that can be replicated where needed.

Governing a communal resource via individuals. We need to embrace the idea that common resources need common use, management and governance. It is suggested that there might be a high degree of resistance to this by current primary users.

Lack of governmental support. The low interest of the representatives, as well as the lack of willingness on their part to support and to implement the innovative governance forms (due to their lack of expertise). In most of the cases, some kind of financial/structural support is necessary. Also, technical support and guidance is needed at the long term.

Replication and innovation

The study cases presented proved that there are diverse models of designing, thinking and practising sustainable and resilient forms of governance in mountain areas, that are strongly relying on local cultural, social, economic, political and natural contexts. Each of these models presented above are considered as examples that worked in a certain area, in a specific period of time and summing a particular number of factors which cannot be entirely replicated. Relying on some basic commons, such as good communication strategies, integration of diverse local stakeholder, participative engagement, rural focused projects, they provide some generable valuable experiences and lessons – positive and / or negative / that should be considered to construct a model of governance of the mountain area. The persistent feature identified in the examined governance model of mountain areas is the multifunctional and/or pluri-activity perspective. This perspective has been acknowledged as an essential element for both replicating successful practices and fostering innovation.

An **ideal governance model** that can be easily replicated and applied does not exists, but we observed that, with feasible improvements, some of them can be adapted to the specific realities. The most successful ones proved to be the ones that integrated the traditional relationships with the innovations in governance when applied in different mountain area situations, as are: modern decision-making process that rely on participative approaches, larger involvement of the communities, especially also marginalised groups, bottom-up approaches to overcome politically unacceptable behaviour and persistence in traditional thinking structures that still exist certain areas.

We observed that the **major challenges, resources and skills** required for effective and efficient replication and implementation of these good models of governance and related, firstly, to the soft and integrative skills of the key persons of the process (communication, charisma and empathy). Secondly, a continuous effort must be done for keeping the community around the general idea and of the objectives of the governance, including consulting \ and keeping them informed and educated, so they will look for proactive implication of the common goals of the whole community. Ultimately, given the persisting disparities between urban and rural regions (including mountainous areas), it is imperative to allocate dedicated external resources (financial, logistical, and expertise-based) to ensure the continued existence of the governance structure.

Research needs

The Mini Paper identified the most relevant research needs, including, but not limited to:

- **Modernity vs. Tradition**: How to implement modernity without damaging tradition? Modern civilization offers benefits to mountain communities, but abrupt socio-cultural evolution has skipped adaptation stages, leading to young people migration to urban areas and abandoning of lifestyle, losing tradition and cultural values. Gentrification, the massive purchase of properties left by locals, often altering architecture, has grown over the past decade, threatening local culture, replacing population declines due to migration, birth rates, and aging demographics. Research

must be done to provide legislative bodies, local governments, communities, architects, and potential investors with the ideal boundaries for mountain development in order to ensure a desired standard of living while, to the greatest extent feasible, maintaining regional identity and values. This study needs to be carried out across Europe, but it also needs to be specifically tailored for certain communities and areas.

- **Performing a cost/benefit analysis of a region based on a true cost model of public goods** involves assessing the tangible and intangible costs and benefits associated with various public goods and services provided within that region. Currently, stakeholders and politicians tend to overlook the significant advantages of providing public goods in mountainous areas and make ill-informed choices about the distribution of resources and the priorities of policies. Research must be done to accurately identify public goods and services, as well as the direct and/or indirect beneficiaries of those services. It must also be done to estimate the public costs associated with those goods and services, carry out sensitivity analyses to evaluate the effects of proposed changes, and propose policy adaptations that will ensure that costs are covered fairly. This study can be conducted anywhere in Europe, where mountains are present.

- **Knowledge GAP: Participatory Methodologies and How to Use Them.** Addressing the knowledge gap surrounding participatory methodologies and their use, including Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs), Rapid Rural Appraisals (RRAs), Participatory Needs-Based Assessments, Community Asset Assessments and Participatory Governance, is essential for fostering inclusive, resilient and effective engagement processes in farming communities. To bridge this gap, comprehensive training programs and capacity-building initiatives are necessary. These programs should encompass understanding the theoretical underpinnings and core principles of participatory methodologies, providing practical training on techniques and tools, recognizing the importance of contextual understanding, addressing ethical considerations, emphasizing community engagement and building the capacity of stakeholders at all levels. By equipping individuals and communities with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary for effective participation, they become empowered to drive their own development agendas, address local challenges, and promote more resilient, inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

Ideas for innovation

As final conclusion, there are proposed pertinent ideas for innovation, including, but not limited to:

- ***Ideas for innovative projects /solutions***

- **Deeper comparative analysis of governance models of mountain areas** is essential for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities presented by these regions. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different governance approaches, policymakers, stakeholders, and communities can develop tailored strategies to promote sustainable development, environmental conservation, and resilience in mountain area. The goal of this analysis is to ensure the conditions for transboundary replication in order to address shared challenges, such as biodiversity conservation, water management, and disaster risk reduction, more effectively. It also seeks to find solutions for a sustainable economic development through the promotion

of responsible and resilient economies. The comparative study could be carried of any European mountain governance.

- **Estimation of possibility of better collaboration of the different mountain regions with similar specificities**. It already exists common challenges and priorities for European mountain areas and there are numerous collaborative initiatives. In order for future collaborative efforts to have the greatest impact on environmental conservation, sustainable development, economic diversification, and social inclusion, it is important to assess the degree to which these initiatives have been successful in fostering cooperation, exchanging best practices, and addressing shared challenges. It is also important to pinpoint any gaps or areas that require improvement. The policy and institutional frameworks that govern cooperation among mountain areas should be evaluated as well. This involves evaluating the institutional capacities, governance structures, and legal and regulatory frameworks that either support or obstruct cross-border cooperation. The research ought to continue on a European scale.

- **Sustainable mountains area integration into regional/national economy** is crucial for promoting balanced and inclusive development, conserving natural resources, preserving cultural heritage, and enhancing the well-being of mountain communities and societies as a whole. To ensure that future collaborative efforts have the greatest possible impact on environmental preservation, sustainable development, economic diversification, and social inclusion, it is important to assess how successful these initiatives have been in fostering cooperation, exchanging best practices, and resolving shared challenges. The institutional and policy frameworks that regulate cooperation among mountain areas should also be explored, with an emphasis on evaluating the governance structures, institutional capabilities, and legal and regulatory frameworks that either support or impede cross-border cooperation. Various stakeholders could play essential roles in this operational group: national, regional, and local government agencies are responsible for policy development, regulation, and implementation related to economic integration and sustainable development in mountain areas; local communities; local business, clusters; civil society organizations; academic and research institutions; regional and inter-governmental bodies.

- **Gender and Youth Mainstreaming** involves integrating gender and youth perspectives into all aspects of new and existing Operational Groups (OGs), Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), programs, Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), research and activities. This elevates them to central considerations rather than treating them as separate or peripheral issues. Gender and Youth Mainstreaming entails recognising and addressing the diverse needs, roles and responsibilities of individuals of all genders and ages throughout the project or program cycle. It systematically incorporates these considerations into design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. By analysing how gender norms and age impact project aspects and implementing strategies to mitigate associated inequalities and diffuse areas of resistance, this innovative approach tackles root causes deeply embedded in societal norms and power structures. Developing Education and Training approaches and tools is necessary as a fundamental initial step to facilitate the successful implementation of this innovation, for everyone from the Commission to the community.

- ***Potential EIP-AGRI Operational Groups:***

- **Setting-up platform for collection and valorisation of economic indicators of agriculture in mountain regions.** A main challenge facing researchers and decision-makers is the lack of public information (data) on the main economic indicators for agriculture and farms in mountainous areas in Bulgaria. This hinders the preparation of comparative analyses of the state of the farms in these areas and, accordingly, no relevant proposals can be made for measures to increase the sustainability and viability of mountain areas. The aim is to establish of the Operational Group "MountainStatDate" aims to bring together researchers, representatives of the non-governmental sector, farmers, local institutions who are employed and work on the territory of mountain areas. The main task is to identify the economic indicators that are important for determining the level of economic viability of farms in mountain areas. To collect the necessary data and to valorisation the information with the stakeholders. As a result, In the end is to set up a platform which consist of all the needed information available to the general public. The specific outputs will be a electronic platform that will contain and maintain sufficient information to help all interested parties in determining the condition of mountain areas in. It will also establish a network of stakeholders to collaborate on decision-making on sustainable mountain river management. The platform will present good practices for the introduction of social and environmental innovations. The task force will work in the mountainous area of the Europe.

- **Facing the threat of gentrification on the mountain area.** The problem of gentrification may be complicated, particularly in places like mountain villages where there may be particular dynamics and difficulties at hand. It's important to keep an eye on the most vulnerable neighbourhoods – by scrutinize them in a adaptative database - while also getting to know the locals' goals and worries about gentrification. Work together to identify and, where necessary, to create initiatives that put inclusion and the well-being of the community first. The primary goal is to identify resilient and sustainable strategies for preserving the socioeconomic variety of the community. One such strategy is to preserve and celebrate the community's cultural legacy, which can aid in preserving its distinctive identity in the face of development challenges. This might entail maintaining historic structures, fostering regional arts and customs, promoting cultural events, and fostering the expansion of neighbourhood businesses run by long-term inhabitants. This can lessen the loss of local business owners and maintain the economic variety of the area. One implicit goal is to give locals the knowledge and tools they need to fight gentrification, including collaborative planning and policies that put the needs of the community first. This will enable them to support and adhere to sustainable development and environmental conservation practices. Maintaining the area's biological integrity and natural beauty can be facilitated by striking a balance between development and environmental preservation.

Further research needs coming from practice, ideas for Operational Groups and other proposals for innovation can be found at the final report of the focus group, available at the FG webpage:
https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/focus-group-competitive-and-resilient-mountain-areas_en

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