

EU CAP Network Focus Group

'Competitive and resilient mountain areas'

Mini Paper 2

Social resilience in mountain areas

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Disclaimer

This Mini Paper has been developed within the frame of the EU CAP Network Focus Group 'Competitive and resilient mountain areas' with the purpose of providing input to the Focus Group discussions and final report.

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Introduction

Mountain areas in various European countries are characterized by major differences between them, such as high income levels in the strongly urbanised Alps compared to much poorer areas in the Balkans, but also share common features, especially in sparsely populated communities far from larger cities: population ageing, departure of young people, part-time inhabiting depending on second-home phenomena or the seasonality of tourism and farming jobs, gradual limitations to accessing good health and education, as well as local unemployment. All these factors press for finding solutions to adverse further total or major abandonment of mountain areas; in other words, social resilience is needed to sustain local societies in mountain areas. The present Mini Paper tries to gather information from various mountain areas in Europe where such problems have been tackled successfully and proposes a set of research needs and ideas for innovation in an effort to improve social resilience, a dynamic phenomenon which requires smart and adaptive solutions.

Living conditions in many mountain areas have become more difficult, not only from an infrastructures' point of view (however internet is available almost anywhere and road networks are generally improving), but also from a social point of view. In Greece, for example, young male farmers explain that one of their major problems is the fact that they cannot find companions, as young women, in many cases, are the first ones to leave the mountain or – in general – rural areas. Thus, for those who want to start a family, especially when they aim to have the collaboration of their companion in the farm, these are major obstacles. It follows that individual improvements in the agricultural value chain, offer-oriented improvements and marketing strategies are not enough to solve the problem of continuous loss of importance of agriculture and jeopardised resilience.

At the end of this paper there is an annex clarifying how this Mini Paper approaches and considers relevant concepts as mountain areas, social resilience in mountain areas and social inclusion.

Social resilience of mountain areas: from innovative ideas over social-business development up to inclusion

How can social resilience in mountain areas be defined and what is needed to strengthen this resilience often forgotten as complicated to monitor and to evaluate?

Social resilience in mountain areas is not only important for maintaining mountain population and economy in the long run; it is also important for social cohesion at the whole territory¹. Over the last years in different European areas, a lot of activities succeed while others failed. What is important is that the experiences were made, tested and hopefully further developed and experimented. Resilience depends on

¹ For our proposed definitions please see the Appendix.



inclusive and solidary practices. Inclusion is not an end in itself; it is a necessity to organise daily life and work for a prosperous outcome. Through capacity-building, new partnerships and coherent territorial topic-transversal approaches, this can be possible, as shown in the following three key issues:

Key issue 1: Promoting collective action as Social Innovation for demographic and economic stability

Mountain areas lose permanent residents and jobs over the long term. Permanent year-round settlement serves many societal interests, including ecological concerns. It can only be maintained if the inhabitants expand their traditional value chains (such as food) through processing and refinement and if they can maintain the goodwill of the majority of population. To achieve these objectives, new forms of cooperation between the population on local scale as well as a new rural-urban commitment are necessary.

Topics: Social enterprises, solidary economy, mutual aid and neighbourship, circular economy, non-growth experiments, agroecology, "neo"-neoruralism, learning region, new ideas of production.

a) NEWBIE New Entrant Network: Business models for Innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience in European agriculture (Panagyurishte, Bulgaria)

New entrants face quite a number of barriers in developing new sustainable farming businesses. NEWBIE wants to help them to overcome these barriers.

[Implementation] NEWBIE is the project of a family business in Panagyurishte in the Sredna Gora Mountains, which cultivates in organic food on a surface of more than 100 ha. They extract essential oils in their distillery and produce high quality cosmetic products under an own trademark (InaEssentials). The products are marketed in 24 countries of the EU and worldwide. The project integrates people who are not newcomers, but new in farming work – the local Romani people.

[Achievements] The innovative aspect is to have established an enterprise that may stabilize the territorial fabric by providing jobs around the year for about 40 Romani families, who are as stigmatised minority one of the most vulnerable groups in Bulgaria. NEWBIE allows permanent incomes and promotes the social integration in the local community.

[Success / Fail factors] Many aspects are new and unusual so we see innovative elements in all steps of the process, especially the aspect to work together with a rather stigmatised group of people who are not trained yet in farming. Therefore, the project combines the aspects of an upcoming value chain with social responsibility and sensitivity. This needs a motivated local coaching team which is able to transfer their motivation with patience to work together with the Romani families to acquire labour skills and responsibility at work. Finally, the families are not only integrated for work, but may raise their social status in the municipality too. This intensifies social



interaction at all stages (farm, business, community). The farmer's family also becomes enabled for an enlargement of their skills by pedagogic competences.

[Why it's a solution?] It is not the new value chain which provides the innovative character of social innovation, but the integral approach to include social factors in the process of production.

b) *New value chains: BE – Bieraria Tschlin SA Tschlin / Grisons in Switzerland*

Today, micro-breweries have become a common trend all over the world. But BE's history is part of a social innovation as the municipality of Tschlin, a small municipality at the Swiss-Austrian border decided to renew the cultivation of barley. Barley has many advantages in this dry valley of Valsot with still existing lynchets at high altitudes. They had been abandoned in favour of the dominating dairy farming. In an act of public brainstorming on the future of the municipality they decided in the early 2000s to create a local brewery to enable the cultivation by the creation of a useful customer as anchor client. Tschlin did not have a brewing tradition, the decision was taken anyway, long before the current trend of micro-breweries was born.

[Implementation] The 1500 shareholders are broadly dispersed, the Annual General Meetings are organised as festivities and the quality is 100% organic. During its history they had to find a new location for a moderate expansion to work profitable, but they remained in the municipality as the local control prevented a relocation.

[Achievements] Well-established brewery with a yearly output of 1500 hectolitres and a diversification of products. Mountain-lowland linkage by the broad spectrum of small shareholders and by the cooperation with the national organic certification body and a large retailer.

[Success / Fail factors] The decision was taken at the local level with the aid of new knowledge from scientific experts who came from outside but were familiar with the local frame, conditions and needs in mountain areas. The experts did not have a commercial interest; the local decision-making at the time was passed by a lucky constellation in the municipality.

[Why it's a solution?] The enlargement of the agricultural production spectrum is in line with changed climatic conditions and consumer demands. It enabled the reconstruction of the cereals value chain in the mountains. Similar activities were undertaken also in other parts of Switzerland followed by a refoundation of a malting house in Switzerland for all Swiss breweries to reduce transport distances and to benefit from this asset.

c) *Rural Equal project (INOVTerra Local Development association)
- Portugal + Spain (Galicia)*

Its aim is to enhance the participation and representation of women in all positions in the agricultural sector, including leadership and decision-making. In particular it



promotes and disseminates rural business lead by women and looks on equal payment for the same positions. Finally, the project focused on empowering women in areas where they experienced difficulties or for which they were not properly trained. The project, implemented in Portugal and Spain (Galicia), was a pilot project intended to be replicated in different European contexts where the same social problem also occurs.

[Implementation] INOV Terra is a partnership project lead by a local development association.

[Achievements] Besides practical recommendations in workshop we should mention the delivery of a Manual of Good Practices for women in rural areas, the organization of awareness-raising actions in Portugal and Galicia (Spain), and the collection of testimonies. An online platform was created to boost small businesses and highlight the role of women in agriculture.

[Success / Fail factors] The experience and know-how of the organisations involved, the involvement of the participants in all phases of the project, the initial diagnosis, the possibility of adjusting the project actions to the needs and constraints of the project's direct beneficiaries, the use of digital media, the reconciliation between formal moments and recreational activities which provided a good atmosphere among the participants, the provision of the materials produced in three languages (Portuguese, English and Galician), the valorisation of the experiences/knowledge of the project's beneficiaries and the involvement of professionals specialized in the field of gender equality, rural world and social inclusion, all contributed to the success of the project. Aspects that hindered the project were the difficulties in reconciling the personal, family and professional life circumstances of the beneficiaries so as to participate in the project's actions, the fact that no men were involved in the project, and – because of the nature of the project – the fact that activities were limited to a small group of participants.

[Why it's a solution?] inclusion (contribution to establish gender equality) – valorisation (Valuing the experiences and the knowledge of women practitioners correct the gender-base asymmetry in gender in salarial relations. It is breaking down role model stereotypes and is encouraging dignity to the agricultural work, especially that carried out by women) – transformation (boost the family economy, through the visibility and the good publicity of the local products produced by the project's beneficiaries may also help to transform rural role models and working conditions.

d) *Regional Development Project 100% Valposchiavo, Grisons (Switzerland)*

Regional Development Projects (PRE) are an instrument of Swiss regional policy under the responsibility of the Federal Office for Agriculture (BLW). One such PRE is the *100% Valposchiavo*. It has set itself the goal of being the first valley in the mountains to produce exclusively certified organic food and to sell most of it within the valley in the spirit of short cycles (at the moment it is 95%). The tourism organisation takes part in this project as well as the gastro and tourist sector, both sourcing most of



their food from the valley. 100% Valposchiavo incorporates both the development of mountain value chains and efforts to maintain social life and work in one of the most peripheral regions of Switzerland. It is described in detail in the Mini Paper 4 “Value chains” (Jitea et al., 2024).

Key issue 2: Inclusion of vulnerable groups

Because mountain regions are tending to lose population and jobs, they must open up to new economic and societal functions on a national/supra-national level. One possibility is to take on tasks in the social and health sector in order to prevent overcrowding in the high-density urban centres, like hosting migrants, offering training in nature-near professions, offering workshop and atelier space for young professionals, as well as possibilities for young and also older neo-farmers (not only neo-rurals!). Such a Welcoming Culture also allows the recruitment of highly qualified specialists (health, social work, education). All new arrivals can contribute to enriching socio-cultural life at a local level. At the same time, vacant buildings can continue to be used and maintained instead of promoting seasonally-used second homes ("cold beds").

Topics: Inclusion of vulnerable groups in general, social farming, volunteers, jobless, handicapped, old and young neo-farmers, environmental activists (ZADistes), refugees.

a) ASTA : Socio-Therapeutic Association of Almeida (Portugal)

The association hosts mental or multi-disabled people and helps them to manage different social in villages in the Malcata Protected Area) near Coa River. The aim of the association is to empower the “fellow partners” as they are called to self-autonomy, in which, through different workshops they develop new skills like working with vegetable gardens, agriculture, carpentry, pottery, cooking or weaving. It offers agrotourism to tourists in which the guest is guided by one of the fellow partners for their empowerment alongside the provision of accommodation services.

[Achievements] The association introduces agrotourism as a new activity in the Malcata Mountains. It has the potential to diversify the existing socio-economic fabric and to offer alternative activities.

[Success / Fail factors] It is yet to early to evaluate the long-term impact on the local municipality and the interaction between the original population and the newcomers. But for the municipality it is probably already a success to have a contribution in stabilizing their inhabitants. And the Association has a peaceful environment for their clients which is only possible with an open-minded local population.

[Why it's a solution?] With new social services the territory maintains its economic and social fabric by providing a sustainable tourism for guests, by being integrated in the local economy, and by rejuvenating the sparsely populated area with new kinds of activities. It contributes to a larger understanding of “development” by promoting the objectives of solidarity and the bridging of urban and rural milieus.



e) Territory without long-term unemployed "Coeur de Savoie" (France)

The aim of this experimental approach is to demonstrate that it is possible, on a local scale and at no significant additional cost to the community, to offer any person who has been out of work for a long time and who so wishes, a permanent job on a voluntary basis, by developing and financing useful activities that do not compete with existing jobs and that meet the needs of the various stakeholders in the area: local residents, enterprises, institutions, etc. 160 French territories (municipalities and Départements) are testing this approach.

[Implementation] A project team was made up of citizens, people who have permanently been deprived of employment, institutions providing integration, and associations and representatives of the municipalities. In addition, a Local Employment Committee, the guarantor of the local project, meets regularly.

[Achievements] Opening of the Acti'Va73 employment company on the 1st of September 2023 with the signing of permanent contracts and the installation of the new team, including the first 12 employees from long-term unemployment.

[Success / Fail factors]

- to have the political support
- to find the consensus between many different socio-economic actors for being able to realise social innovation
- the capability to adapt and to find solutions quickly for acting and moderating differently

[Why it's a solution?] It is an experiment, a social innovation for individual and collective emancipation. It is an investment of local engagement which boosts the dynamic of peripheral areas. With 160 cases, not all cases will be probably successful. But it will have benefits for all stakeholders as it helps to find tailor-made solutions for local communities.

f) PaceFuturo Pettinengo, Piedmont and other examples in the Alps and Abruzzo (Italy)

PaceFuturo is one of several examples in the Italian Alps and Abruzzo where an open attitude towards refugees from the part of the municipality, its local civil society organisations and residents, has made it possible to welcome refugees and integrate them into community life for mutual benefit. The province of Biella has undergone a tough structural change – first from agriculture to the textile industry, then from the restructuring of industry and the exodus of the population. Taking in refugees in Pettinengo makes it possible to maintain the community infrastructure and to make the new infrastructure created for refugees accessible to all residents of the community. Refugees work in the reconstruction of hiking lanes (historical paths used by the working peasants from the villages to the textile factories in Biella), in catering, textile handicraft and in cooperation with local businesses, including the remaining companies of the textile industry.



[Implementation] PaceFuturo was founded by a group of people from outside Pettinengo who started an initiative in the upheavals of the 2001 attacks and met with the favour of the municipal representatives, who made the site (a villa with a 10 ha park) available.

[Achievements] With the aid of the municipality of Pettinengo, PaceFuturo established a refugee reception center according to the Italian regulations and is active in integration measures within the community and the neighboured municipalities.

[Success / Fail factors] It was the combination of a group of external people with the lucky constellation of local stakeholders who were open-minded and confident so that PaceFuturo could let the villa with the park for the reception centre in a rural area. It is important, that every service to the refugees is free also to the permanent inhabitants of Pettinengo (a model which was also applied in the municipality of Riace near Reggio in Calabria).

[Why it's a solution?] International migration and rural depopulation are widespread problems which cannot be solved alone or individually. Efforts are necessary to bridge the rural-urban divide as well as the social cleavages between the original residents and the foreigner to maintain societal cohesion for the sake of both.

d. Association to support the inclusion of Migrants, AIIR (Portugal)

Associação de Apoio à Inclusão de Imigrantes e Refugiados (AIIR) supports migrants and refugees for social and professional inclusion.

[Implementation] AIIR is located in Ima, a village in the district of Guarda (Center/North Portugal) and welcomes four families of refugees from Muslim minorities granting them a home and a job in a project of regenerative agriculture. This project was set to welcome refugees in a second line of support after the welcoming national programs finished. In the beginning, AIIR, aligned with strategic partners, granted funding and signed a contract to supply big markets with blueberries and vegetables.

[Achievements] AIIR was started with the main objectives to host families by providing a home and supporting all family members in their professional, educational and sociocultural insertion in a mountain area context, with the aim to repopulate the village. The project granted them the economic funds for their own work.

[Success / Fail factors] From an agronomic point of view, the first product, the cultivation of blueberries. But the project could be redesigned and they started to produce chutney of different horticulture products that they named "Bora", which means "better" in Swahili; it allowed the creation of different types of jobs for them.

[Why it's a solution?] From the beginning of the project, the the population of Ima (until then populated by elderly people only) increased from 20 to 41 by the settlement of three refugee families. The repopulation through the integration of migrants was said to be this village's renaissance.



e. The integration of Albanian families in the Greek part of the transboundary Prespa Park (border area between Albania, Greece and North Macedonia)

The Prespa Lakes catchment area (2519 sq. km, 840-2600 m.a.s.l.) was declared the first transboundary protected area in the Balkans in February 2000. This remote and sparsely populated mountain area is well-known for its high biodiversity, a great part of which depends on various human activities favourable to nature, from the littoral zone to the dense oak and beech forests, and to the sub-alpine grasslands. The Greek part of the Prespa Park area is classified as National Park: it is also famous for its crops, namely the dry white middle-sized and giant beans (approx. 1000 ha in an irrigated network of 1400 ha), the cultivation of which demands substantial numbers of workers, especially in the beginning of the sowing of crop in late spring – early summer and at the harvesting season in autumn. Since the 1990s, this demand was largely – often totally – covered by Albanian workers coming from Prespa (the Albanian part of it), who also worked in the stock-breeding sector mainly as shepherds, as well as builders.

[Implementation] As the demand for labour remained high and jobs in Albania were scarce, many of these hard-working people stayed for long periods in the Greek part of Prespa (a municipality of 18 settlements with currently less than 1000 permanent inhabitants), made acquaintances and friendships with local people and gradually brought their families, especially in the late 1990s' – early 2000s.

[Achievements] Today approximately 20 families originating from Albania stay permanently in the Greek side, have become members of the local society and keep their own farming businesses, while many of their children were born in Greece and went or go to the local schools (facts automatically giving them the Greek citizenship), study at Greek universities, while those men who got the Greek citizenship also did their military service in the Greek army.

[Success / Fail factors] The successful integration of these families in an area very close to their place of origin, but in another country, was not the result of some specific transnational project between Greece and Albania. The whole process relied mainly on the good will of people from both countries, the determination of these specific Albanian workers to move permanently to the Greek part of Prespa, and the fact that they complied with the Greek/EU immigration regulations. Actually, as simple as it may seem to readers from other EU countries, the main success factor in this case lies with the fact that these people made sure to attain their residence permits (which had to be renewed every six months in the beginning and every two years later on) based on the fact that they worked legally and permanently in Greece (D. Boutla, Prespa Municipality, personal communication), which was not the choice of hundreds of other Albanian people who occasionally worked in the same area.



[Why it's a solution?] Social integration in remote and sparsely populated areas is usually an objective of specific projects aiming at reinforcing local communities with immigrants or minority groups of various origins. However, as in the present case study, it may be the result of the implementation of processes of immigration policies by decisive people who wished to leave their country and establish in a neighbouring area on the other side of the borders – and a climate of welcoming at the other side.

Key issue 3: Education and training

Young people leave the mountains because they find better career and life opportunities in less remote, usually urban, areas. As long as contemporary knowledge is produced outside the mountain regions at central places, this cannot be prevented. However, it can be seen as a great opportunity as it can be concluded that by the acquisition of new knowledge from outside, the attractiveness of mountain regions will be improved in the long term. This assumes that the young generation who complete their higher education outside the mountain regions can be won back after their apprenticeship, studies and training years. It is also an argument for prioritising higher education in mountain-specific topics (environment, natural hazards, food production) in mountain regions (quite also as a branch of an internationally renowned university).

a) Social Resilience in a Rhodope mountain area (Smilyan kidney beans, Upper Arda valley, Bulgaria)

Small scale farmers, local authorities, local communities and cultural centre in the Upper Arda valley, together with external researchers of the Bulgarian Academy of Science joined together about 20 years ago to preserve a very specific variety of Smilyan kidney beans. The plant grows at a small area and has a very specific taste and flavour with high nutritional value. Due to its small distribution in a depopulated area the cultivation, which has a history of more than 250 years, was on decline and became more and more forgotten. The efforts of more than 20 years to make this nutritional plant survive aimed to regain the necessary knowledge of plantation under current conditions and to learn to market it as a high-valued local speciality.

[Implementation] The implementation resulted in a cooperation with the Balkan Slow Food Branch and brought up a number of local events. To mention: the Smilyan Beans Festival, which affirms both traditional pure agricultural products and cultural heritage, involves innovative approaches such as gourmet modern cuisine with traditional products and Smilyan beans, children's creative panels with agricultural products, beans, lentils, corn etc. Furthermore, it includes an active participation in international Slow food exhibitions and initiatives such as Slow beans network and Balkan Slow Food events. The logo and the registered trademark underline the territorial anchoring of the Smilyan beans. Besides the old techniques, it enables to promote new sustainable agri-ecological practices, e.g. the use of bean plants after the harvest as green fertilizer and intercropping of the staple food plants (beans, potatoes, and maize).

[Achievements] The Upper Arda Valley has resisted as an alive and active area, with many basic services like kindergartens, school and health services. A fair price for the most famous and sought-after variety of beans in Bulgaria has been achieved – it is



now five times higher thanks to the promotion and activities for two decades. The price of that specific bean variety is 2.5 times more than the average price of other Bulgarian beans. The reviving of this product also gave rise to a tourist destination for sustainable tourism famous for delicious traditional food, hospitality and beautiful nature. The beans are also estimated as an important role for healthy and sustainable diets as they are a valuable source of protein. Cultivation of the arable patches of land in the mountain area helps the management and prevention of ruderal and invasive species in the neighboring grasslands habitats.

[Success / Fail factors] There were persistent efforts of the community and devoted researchers, a clear vision and goals as well as a leadership. With this, the unfair competition due to the peripheral small-scaled location could be reduced. It opened the way to a certain international collaboration and led to an increased interest for local beans with traceable origin in quest of plant sources of protein. There is still a lack of knowledge and interest about local culture and food by the young people which was to be overcome. Furthermore, the climate warming may reduce the cultivation of Smilyan beans. On the other hand, as the pressure on the food supply chain due to climate change is high, every possibility for a diversification is important; it is worth to consider the beans as the protein of the future.

[Why it's a solution?] It links several important objectives of sustainable regional development as there is the secure and sustainable food production also in peripheral areas of the Upper valley, the stabilisation of demography and the remembering of the cultural heritage.

b) AJITouR (France): Young people discover mountain professions

The French Alps are experiencing an ageing population, while some young people would like to be able to settle or stay in mountain areas. The study trip called AJITouR was organised in the AJITeR project, which aimed to support young people wishing to settle in the mountains and local authorities working to make it easier for them to do so.

[Implementation] A group of 10 young people between 19 and 26 years old, from both urban and mountain backgrounds, participated in a one-week study trip, organised by CIPRA France & educ'Alpes through the Haut Queyras, the highest permanently populated valley system in the entire Alps (Saint-Véran, 2042 m.a.s.l). During this trip the group met around twenty professionals from a wide range of fields (mountain guides, refuge wardens, shepherds, craftsmen, local authorities, etc.). An interview grid defined by the young people at the start of AJITOUR enabled them to ask the professionals about their job: training, daily routine, salary, etc. The professionals gave advice to the young and above all passed on their energy and motivation.

[Achievements] Mentoring of 10 young people about mountain jobs, the everyday life in mountain areas and what could be the next step for them for realising their wish to live (again) in mountains. Cultural and interpersonal exchanges about the quality of life, the way of life especially on its sense and work-life-balance with potential professional orientations to take.



[Success / Fail factors]

- Direct and personal exchange with different people about their professions, the difficulties and challenges in their everyday life in the mountain area, their settlement and development of their activities, the acceptance of their profession in the local mountain society.
- Policy recommendations presented and discussed during the alpWeek 2020 on the topic of “Youth & Climate” (interactive exchange between young people and policy makers of the Alpine Convention & EUSALP).
- Limit of the project budget and time to continue the mentoring of the 10 young people to help them develop their installation and activity in a mountain area.

[Why it's a solution?] Promote potential of mountain territories for young people.

c) MAIs.Women farmers in the inner territories (Portugal)

Encourage and reinforce the public participation of women farmers in the inner territories, through their training and empowerment, by encouraging their civic and political intervention at the local level and by enhancing their social role, in order to contribute to the promotion of equality between women and men and to reduce economic and social disparities. Empowering and giving visibility to women farmers in different mountainous areas, through agroecology, digital skills, collective skills, gender equality.

[Implementation] Based on a diagnosis and characterization of the socio-spatial context of women farmers, different measures were implemented, including activities to empower women in order to help them creating new activities, individually and collectively. The measures were based on their technical training (agroecology, natural products such as wool, linen or straw, digital, social media, machine sewing course, etc., on the development of personal and organizational skills, the training of local technicians and the construction of a collective project that promotes the participation of women farmers in rural areas.

[Achievements] Two local associations in S. Pedro do Sul, including about 20 women from rural areas are working to develop and sell wool and linen products, to maintain the traditional practices, and to promote their activities together with local tourism. These women are also participating at local and national level as mentors and teachers for other associations and activities whose work is based on these natural products. A traditional processing from Sabugal – Bracejo was certified by the national authorities which raises their visibility and their status. Old local activities, that might contribute to increase touristic activities as well as collective action were identified and reactivated like traditional rural songs, community oven, community mill.



[Success / Fail factors] Women are always keen to be involved and participate, sharing their knowledge. The cultural and technical patrimony and knowledge of these women is outstanding. Recognition of this value is rising and contributes to allocate local resources to sustain them. Some factors may compromise the sustainability of the project: The distance between the living places and the agenda of the women, who are always needed on their farm/house; the lack of transport; the lack of support to maintain the complex social relations.

[Why it's a solution?] It promotes collective activities, based on the community knowledge and patrimony, as an empowerment strategy, giving visibility to rural women.

d) Val Lumnezia / Grisons (Switzerland)

It is the case of a very peripheral valley in Grisons in its Romanish speaking part (the fourth Swiss language) dominated by agriculture. In such valleys you have to go out to make apprenticeship or higher education, and, in a successful situation (for the territory), you come back. The case of Lumnezia describes a situation where young skilled artisans of different professions came back in the 1980s with the idea to start business for introducing mass tourism. This strategy quickly failed. They looked for professional aid by an association which defends the interests of mountain territories whose experts recommended a nature-near tourism and to cooperate with environmental NGOs.

[Implementation] The foundation of the organism "Pro Val Lumnezia" (today "Ir novas vias" – "New ways") was very important as it brought together not only the eight single dwarf municipalities (which now have merged, with today about 2'100 inhabitants) but also started a serious discussion on the future of the valley. The main progress was that they were the first to begin a fruitful dialogue with the environmental NGOs of Grisons which was a novelty at the time in Switzerland as is still today an issue of tensions between town and countryside. With this new approach it was possible to gain seed money from the Swiss Confederation in the framework of regional policies which enabled the administrations to finance several infrastructure, as, for example, to renew the infrastructure of alpine pastures, to build a slaughterhouse and to build hiking trails.

[Achievements] A constructive dialogue with the environmental NGOs, the intensified communication between the isolated single villages which prepared the fusion to one municipality. Finally, raising the visibility of a valley which is very often seen as "potential poor" (which means to be abandoned).

[Success / Fail factors]

- Initiative of a young generation of skilled artisans mainly in the professions of construction.
- Looking for new knowledge outside, but always in reach of the same milieu (mountain development), which means it was not an external marketing organisation not familiar with mountain issues but experts who were at the time at the top of new approaches for regional development in rural mountain areas.
- Open-minded population who was able to cooperate with the "enemy".



[Why it's a solution?] It is the example of a “Learning region” adapting continuously to the exigencies of a changing world beyond its direct neighbourhood. This enables the balance between preservation and change.

Conclusions

The 13 show cases provide a diverse picture of mountain areas in Europe. They show that a variety of approaches are suitable for taking initiatives and thus achieving success in the interests of the community. Success is reflected by the persisting motivation within the community, by keeping in the minds of higher-level decision-makers (politicians, investors, potential residents willing to move in) and by the finally stabilised number of inhabitants, services and jobs. Mountain agriculture no longer has the dominant position it once had. It has gone from being a principal economic activity to a second role in these mountainous territories, often replaced by tourism. Agriculture remains with a strong economic position when the entire territory is doing well and if it can count on the solidarity of all sectors and activities, produced under biodiversity-friendly conditions, and contributing to improved performance and collective recognition. There is potential for new food products to satisfy the natural potential and the changing societal demand for healthy and sustainably produced food. There is also a clear need for new functions for agriculture, which will also win back the recognition of the urban population. There is no need for big brands; it is enough to guarantee transparency and the confidence to deliver quality without telling too many stories for marketing reasons only. The interplay and balance between (local and supra-regional) institutions and individual leadership is particularly important. Neither the one nor the other alone will pull the coals out of the fire.

But the mountain regions can do much more: if they know how to credibly contribute to the debate on global problems (biodiversity through the maintenance of the cultural landscape without pesticides; shorter value chains with lower CO₂ emissions; less standardised landscapes than in the large tourist destinations; open reception of migrants for mutual benefit), then the mountain regions could once again play a role in the sovereignty of interpretation of their own and also global problems. Not alone, but on an equal footing. The urban lowlands could also benefit from this.

Research needs

1 Needs derived from practice

Filling specific lacks of the CAP

The CAP is supporting young farmers in the E.U. by two main measures: (1) with an initial amount in order to start a farming business with the obligation to remain in the business for minimum 5 years, and (b) with higher amounts in order to invest in the business, on the basis of delivering a competitive business plan that is evaluated by the competent state authorities. Such measures are indispensable in order to attract



young people (20-40 years old) to rural areas, those who already have land and family tradition and, secondarily, to make young people move from the city to the rural mountain area and start farming. In that sense, such incentives should clearly continue be given to young farmers through CAP measures.

However, many farmers, older than 40 years old, do stay in mountain areas and start or maintain farming businesses based on their pure decision to do so, even if they are not beneficiaries of “historic rights” of high value per unit for the basic / Pilar 1 payment, or are eligible for such payment, but with very low amounts per year. They have to make a living from selling products while depending very little of CAP subsidies and do not accomplish a safe income. All these people are left out of CAP provisions in terms of incentives to start and/or maintain and/or improve their farms. The banking system is also not giving support to these people at least valid for Greece) because there is no “guarantee” from CAP subsidies in case things go wrong. The CAP should be re-directed to a less industrialised highly subsidized mass production with a high input on pesticides towards a more small-scaled agriculture according to agroecological principles.

2 More general research needed

a. Research on the urban-to-rural returnees to restart with farm work

- To make a survey with people who left their mountain area for living in the lowlands in order to detect the reasons to leave; together with evaluating their quality of life in terms of education, income, leisure, and professional satisfaction – always compared with the expectations when leaving.
- How many young farmers that were subsidized to establish a mountain farming business have remained in the profession after the obligatory 5-year period? What were the main reasons to remain in the profession or to make them abandon the effort after the obligatory phase?
- What made 40-60 years old people come back to the mountain area and start a mountain farming business? What incentives should they be given in the CAP framework?
- A repeating research question is the survey on the succession of old farmers: How many of the young generation will follow? What will be the administrative regulations (incentives or restrictions)?

b. Research on urban-to-rural newcomers

- How to integrate second homeowners into the all-day life of permanent dwellers? How to make them to active mountain areas residents?
- What are the long-term experiences of urban to rural migrants, distinguished according to social status, status within the life cycle (young families, established couples, retired people)? How long do they stay and what happens in old age?
- How to integrate migrants by force who are distributed to mountain areas to become active members of the local communities? How long do they stay?

c. Research on the reintroduction of older techniques and forgotten tacit knowledge



- Local knowledge and seemingly "retro" agri-ecological practice of cultivating and promoting varieties resilient to drought /climate changes and local traditional food value and heritage.
- How to correct/modify current high impact practices to a perhaps less productive but more nature-near practice?

d. Research on the enlargement of mountain value chains by attracting academic people for higher education

- There is hardly any dispute: The full range of careers for mountain socialised people also with tertiary degrees as well as the possibility of international experience would raise their social status and would avoid leaving permanently. It would also allow that enterprises in mountain areas could hire well trained people as engineers. Can we see any progress in this field? We propose analysing and monitoring the access of mountain people to higher education as well as the progress in implementing universities, applied universities or national institutes in mountain territories. What kind of approaches are already established, what is their outcome and added value combined with the potential and eventual needs for a further development?
- Evaluation of the efforts needed to complete the food value chain in the mountains by its higher value adding parts: Conception, processing and marketing to satisfy the national demands (renaissance of the apprenticeship in food technologies, research in market analysis, international exchange).

e. Research on the relation between rural and urban milieus

- How to bridge demands on better esteem of their producing work (claimed by mountaineers) and demands for green-keeping in the sense of ecology, biodiversity, against water pollution (demanded by the urbans)?
- How to redraw the paradigm of offer-oriented regional development strategies (by multiplying new products and an artificial creation of new demands) towards a demand-oriented strategy to respond on the urgent priorities for a safe, sustainable and solidary production of food for regional and national/European needs (without export subsidies by the CAP)?

Ideas for innovation

1 Ideas for innovative projects /solutions

We are well aware that innovation cannot be planned. The show cases do not mean that they can be scaled up by using them to other regions in a copy-paste procedure. Using the show cases as a role model means that they should never be copied but to be inspired by the ideas behind the example. This should be tried out. Nevertheless, we present some ideas:

- Introducing new ideas by looking for advice from outside of different sources without being dependent from an urban perception of the rural.
- Accepting new people coming but demanding high standing to host them fairly and preciously: Qualified people instead of cheap private companies



for the security of asylum seekers. Pedagogic training. Godparent/mentors towards newcomers. Skilled translators and specialized administration officers.

- Developing new ideas in environmental progress in food production instead of transforming producing territories in consumption landscapes by re-qualifying apprenticeships and qualified work in production, as well as industries using natural resources for textile production (wool cluster in the hinterlands of Toulouse, as studied in the Alpine wide project AlpTextyles).
- New forms of “mutual sub-contracting“ by cooperations between the gastro-tourist branch and the local food producers. Successful competing the current model of globalized tourism platforms by regional platforms with personal hosting and precious quality control as well as gaining the value added for regional development (model “Gîte de France or “Les Bistros de Pays”” instead of “Airbnb”).
- Including the experience of the elderly by promoting programmes to re-integrate them into the labour market, not mainly because of to make a social programme but rather to cope with a lack of workforce and to benefit from an esteem of old tacit knowledge.
- Re-introduce the “corvée”! By including the new habitants².
- Re-introduce certain old seasonal events of festivities which were an obligation in former times and which should be re-invented under clear and strict criteria to avoid commercial abuse (a little bit like the regulations of the Basel Fasnacht – a balance between restricted and open public space and expressions).
- Legumes as a rich protein source in plant-based diets, protein transition, agroecology (green fertilizer).
- Increase the efforts to preserve old plants and breeds which have become rare species to fulfil the double objective of biodiversity and a new product quality.
- Mountain digital hub to build capacity and boost innovation in mountain areas.
- Develop new forms of succession models in agricultural and livestock farms.
- Intensify the argumentation for promoting traditional knowledge and agroecological practices among the young farmers (evidence of biodiversity, individual well-being of farmers, less dependency on the agro-business etc.).

² For the readers outside the Alps: Annual day(s) for obligatory collective work in the interest of the whole municipality.



2 Potential EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

Elaborating alternatives to the subsidy policies based on maximised productivity by the focus on large surfaces, scaling effects, outsourcing of fodder supply etc. The OG's task would be to find out how to break the prevailing paradigm of economies of scale (which is associated with overproduction and predatory competition). This concerns all stakeholders:

- A new definition of agricultural productivity should be demanded from the concept developers.
- A motivated implementation is required from the farming community (cultural acceptance of a definition of productivity which is based on repair instead of market expansion).
- The transformation to more complex and hence more expensive food must be accepted by consumers, at the same time socially acceptable.
- The political and lobbying institutions must be flexible in developing new, i.e. different financing instruments.

Elaborating regionally based food processing with new business models: Including regional stakeholders, new forms of organisation: cooperative models, solidary economy, public private partnerships. Approach: Regional anchoring, quality control, withstanding the market power of large retailers. In fact, this would not only be the countermodel to the tendencies of international snow tourism, concentrating in large international groups. It would also be a counter-model against a few mountain brands with international marketing (also by Slowfood), while the rest has problems to sell (because a sustainable mountain agriculture may appear as too expensive and not in the priority of the own state).

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>



Appendix

Further reading and references

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Further information on the cases studies:

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Definitions and common understanding

[Mountain areas] Mountain areas in various European countries are characterized by major differences, such as in the income levels in the Alps and cities near large ski centres elsewhere compared to much poorer areas in the Balkans, but also share common features, especially in social matters. Population ageing, departure of young people, part-time inhabiting depending on the seasonality of tourism jobs or farming, gradual limitations to accessing good health and education, as well as local unemployment in specific social groups are factors pressing for finding solutions to adverse further total or major abandonment of mountain areas; in other words, social resilience is needed to sustain local societies in mountain areas with their specificities.

From an agricultural perspective, this includes all areas where the relief, the local climate and the limitations of the land play a role, regardless of whether the areas are classified as high or low mountain ranges. Agriculture has always been important in mountain areas. However, the situation has shifted in the last century. While tourism was initially an additional source of income for farmers, in many places it is now the main activity and agricultural production is a supplier for tourism and second home owners. Some valleys have been industrialised during this time and are struggling with deindustrialisation. But even where agriculture still dominates, a change in function has taken place. According to the CAP's promotion strategies, which focus on land size and economies of scale, the land is no longer necessarily farmed by farmers from the village, but by specialised farmers from neighbouring communities. This corresponds to the commuting practices of other occupational groups. In addition, with the promotion of young farmers, the promotion of competitive businesses has taken centre stage and regional development (and certainly not planning) has taken a back seat. Both have changed social life in the villages. This development is likely to be similar in many European mountain regions. The only differences are in income levels between the individual countries and in the intensity of tourism within a mountain region. From the point of view of long-term resilience, this development is problematic.

In general, it is assumed that mountain regions are rural areas. The absolute population size, population density and centrality serve as a yardstick for this. On the other hand, some mountain regions are now very extensively integrated into global value chains and migration movements. This is known as urbanisation. It is taking place continuously and the boundaries are becoming blurred. However, urbanisation is never complete. It is therefore still correct to speak of the rural-urban dichotomy and of rural-urban linkages.



[Social resilience in mountain areas] Social resilience means that the social fabric of a society remains stable and healthy over a longer period of time and can withstand internal and external shocks. In mountain regions this means to withstand the structural disadvantages of sparsely populated areas with steep topography through intensified cooperation and the search for a balance of interests in the event of conflicting goals, both the pull of migration and external investor pressure, and to find support at a higher level for locally developed development goals.

Challenging situations that exist today in the Alps such as a population exodus, climate change mitigation, mobility, and the consumption of resources cannot be solved through technological progress alone – social change is required. It is necessary to tackle the challenges from a societal point of view and the potential that lies within society: personal initiatives, new collaborations, new ideas which bring together social and economic facts. This concerns mountain communities, valley communities and districts/counties/cantons as well as the institutions of civil society and the interest groups of professional groups and economic sectors and nature conservation organisations. For resilience of mountain areas, the appreciation of societal institutions is also needed, values such as pluralism, the participation of young people as well as the elderly, sustainable ways of life and self-determination in various projects and activities.

[Social inclusion] By this we mean the search for the best possible integration of newcomers to mountain areas, for whatever reasons they may have come, in the common interest of strengthening the local society in the long term. Ideally, the newcomer's social status will improve and the community will benefit from the newcomer's specific qualifications and life experiences. Such endeavours are often time-consuming and sometimes tedious. It certainly requires voluntary work. On the other hand, the municipalities should also be able to request professional help from higher-level jurisdictions.

[Social innovation (SI)] There are two different views on this. The pioneers of SI research, like Frank Moulaert, see SI as a process of collective emancipation for empowerment and institution-building, in which associations of civil society and the local population achieve common goals and are thus also perceived as interlocutors at a higher political level, which enables them to be heard and to succeed in regional development. In the Anglo-Saxon view, the amelioration of value chains by private enterprises and the promotion of volunteers to compensate welfare state decline plays a greater role – but these in fact are innovations on a business model, i.e. economic innovations. Social innovations differ from economic innovations in that they primarily aim to improve coexistence, cooperation and the collective ability to assert oneself against structurally stronger institutions, while economic successes are indirect joint products. SI is therefore to be understood as transformative and is linked to the solution of overarching problems (climate change, biodiversity, territorial cohesion). SI comprises new approaches, combinations and forms of social interaction in order to promote sustainable development, good governance and quality of life in mountain regions. It is also a process for coming up with new ideas and enabling people to have a say in the fundamental choices made by society, i.e. a question of governance.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between economic and social innovation. In the present text we focus only on the latter; the opportunities and conditions of new value chains are treated in another Mini Paper of the present Focus Group.



