

Which are the main issues concerning the future management of mountain territories?

Mountain regions occupy about a quarter of the global terrestrial land surface and provide goods and services to more than half the humanity.

Considering this important role of the mountains, there are various environmental, economic and social issues that should be taken into consideration for the future management of mountain territories; among these some of the most important in our opinion are the following:

Conservation of biodiversity

Mountains are storehouses of biodiversity due to their great variety of habitats and life zones and due to the fact that mountain people have developed different cultures and land use systems. Mountains are often refuges of last resort for biodiversity, and they also continue creating new biodiversity but the present rate of intensification of human use of resources puts this biological and cultural heritage at risk of extinction.

Conservation of biodiversity includes all species of plants and animals and there are many examples all around the world showing how biodiversity management can be implemented successfully.

Reduction of poverty

Mountain people are among the world's poorest and most disadvantaged. People living in the mountains are often far from the centers where decisions on economic and social policies are taken and for this reason they have little influence on them.

The consequence of this situation is that many mountain people live on the economic fringe as subsistence farmers, day laborers and traders. Moreover the products of their work can hardly be competitive with those of big producers working in different geographical realities.

National policies should take into account the needs and the conditions of mountain people and territories, paying also attention to the possible differences existing from the cultural, religious and economic point of view. For this reason they should support those sectors that are particularly important and strategic for mountain regions such as: water reserves management, tourism, recreational activities, conservation of nature and countryside.

Competitiveness of mountain regions

Connected with the previous issue there is, in our opinion, another important challenge to face for the future management of mountain areas, and it is to help the growth of competitiveness of mountain regions.

Mountain regions could be effectively competitive if national and local authorities are going to work for:

- ≡ promoting innovation in all parts of the countries;

- ⊖ supporting growth where growth potential exists, like for example in those sectors quoted above (water reserves management, tourism, recreational activities, conservation of nature and countryside, etc...);
- ⊖ securing favorable and predictable conditions for business to operate within;
- ⊖ decentralising power and means in order to facilitate, where possible, local solutions to local challenges.

Importance of international and transboundary cooperation

International cooperation helps in implementing concrete actions to improve the lives of mountain people and protect mountain environments around the world.

International cooperation is particularly important in those mountain areas placed on borders of different countries.

Many borders are naturally placed in remote mountain areas, where low population density and less development pressure have created great conditions for preservation of ecological diversity. There are a lot of international agreements at global and regional level protecting specific areas and natural conditions. Two specific international conventions, the Alpine Convention and more recently the Carpathian Convention, are specific treaties for the protection and sustainable development of those mountain areas.

But sometimes protected areas do not start and operate at the same time and in the same way on either side of a border. In this sense international/transboundary cooperation is important for creating conditions and bodies that can help to work with the same procedures and for the same projects, because borders should not make sense within an ecological unit.

International/transboundary cooperation is important also because it can support local capacities to study, analyze and manage natural resources with a coordinated, transboundary, integrated approach.

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