



Towards Integrated Mountain Area Development and its Recognition in the Common Agricultural Policy – Shaping the New European Space

4-5 October 2007 in Piatra Neamt, Romania

MEMORANDUM OF THE CONFERENCE

This memorandum gathers the main issues presented at the Euromontana conference in Piatra Neamt, Romania. The memorandum represents the points of view of the conference participants and does not directly represent the views of Euromontana or the participating organisations.

The conference was organised by Euromontana, the European Association of Mountain Areas, in cooperation with CEFIDEC Training and Innovation Centre in the Carpathians, and Romontana and supported by the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission, the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and the Neamt County of Romania. The event attracted around 270 multisectoral actors of mountain areas from 14 different countries from Western, Central and Eastern Europe, including national, regional and local authorities, regional development organisations, environmental and forestry actors, agriculture and research and training institutions.

Introduction

Mountain areas represent 40% of the greater European landmass and 20% of the population. European mountain areas are repositories of diversity – diversity of culture, heritage, crafts, food products, languages and biodiversity – all ingredients with a potential for sustainable innovation that benefit also the European society.

At the same time mountain agriculture and food production face physical impediments leading to on-costs and lower economic efficiency that hinder modernisation of the conditions of production. In the context of the rapidly changing environment of the new European Union member states it is particularly important to promote recognition of the value of mountain communities and economic activities in mountain areas, maintaining land management and agricultural activities and therefore the local and qualified workforce and population. In these countries the fast pace of change tends to result in the value of mountain areas being overlooked and underestimated. These areas need adapted policies and innovative solutions to diversify their economies and to be

able to take care of the precious environmental and cultural resource that they contain.

PLENARY SESSIONS

Recognising and rewarding the benefits of certain economic activities in mountain areas

Certain economic activities within mountain areas create social, environmental and cultural public benefits not only for the areas themselves but also for society at large. However, the viability of these activities is often insecure.

Collective economic action can facilitate the development of clusters, new projects, experiments and pragmatic actions. The specific case of *Tête de Moine* cheese in Switzerland demonstrates how a single product can be crucial to the vitalisation of a specific region.

Positive externalities such as landscape, species variety and habitats in remote areas can be an asset to the development of a territory, but in certain cases they require the support of public funding. This can be done for example through agro-environmental schemes and most specifically through the second pillar of the Common Agriculture Policy that can be a real opportunity to guarantee public goods.

Mountain areas have common characteristics but the solutions have to be adapted to each specific case.

Improving the management of the sanitary and veterinary norms to maintain small farms and processing units in the mountain areas

Traditional food is often produced on a small-scale, through traditional methods and developed by farm households that have their own concept of food security. The continuation of the traditional activity depends on the product quality, market and profit.

Producers have to meet mandatory (EU regulation) and voluntary standards (Guides to good practices). In order to maintain the European heritage in product diversity, the mandatory legislation provides flexibility for food produced in remote areas and for traditional production and methods.

The case of France shows that the reform is difficult to implement at a regional level and that the producers are still concerned with the new hygiene rules adopted in 2002. It is essential to establish a dialogue with the public authorities in order to adapt the regulations to small farms in a best possible way. Agriculture Chambers have an important role to play in this context because they represent the general interest of the farmers.

The European heritage represented by product diversity has high value. It is possible to respect the European sanitary and veterinary norms and still preserve the economic activity. It is necessary to reduce the administrative burden for

traditional products in the regulation process and to take into consideration the views of small producers while still achieving food safety and consumer protection. Traditional production systems represent the culture and identity of local populations and maintaining them is a challenge for the rural development.

Cooperation for innovation between mountain areas

The LEADER programme is a major cooperation tool for mountain areas. Networking between mountain local action groups should be developed also on transnational level.

The Carpathian Convention is an example of an agreement between the governments of the Carpathian region to work together for the protection and promotion of this mountain area.

The Balkan Foundation demonstrates how a Convention can be an important step in developing cooperation between and within mountain areas in South Eastern Europe because it will establish a legal framework for sustainable regional development. Mountain areas need an integrated approach towards sustainable development and the conventions can contribute to such an approach. It is important, however, to learn from and adapt the Alpine and Carpathian experiences for the development of the South Eastern Europe convention.

Civil society is an important element in the elaboration of mountain policies and a common action will valorise economic, natural and culture specificities in the territory.

WORKING GROUPS

1) Economic constraints and opportunities of pastoralism

Pastoralism is a stock breeding activity, where natural spaces are used in an extensive way and involves mobility of herds to a greater or lesser degree. The decline of population and agricultural activity, diminishing economic profitability, lack of markets, too strict sanitary regulations, and the perceived low quality of life of the producers are some of the current constraints for the sector.

On the other hand new opportunities are offered by local dynamics, generation change in farming, tourism potential, the adding of value to quality products, maintenance of the territory and environmental protection (positive externalities), and a shift in public policy in favour of pastoralism offer new opportunities.

The positive externalities of the pastoralism activity must be publicly recognized and a strong policy should be implemented by the Member States.

2) Rural Tourism

Sustainable tourism is a way to diversify rural economies in mountain areas and can provide alternative income and self-employment to the population of these areas.

Strong partnerships should be organized between cultural activities, cultural heritage, gastronomy, agriculture, environmental sector, tourism, local villages, knowledge providers and the transport sector.

Rural tourism depends on environment, landscape, crafts, culture and tradition to succeed. However, local quality products have a special role in influencing and securing rural tourism. In this sense, it is crucial to develop appropriate measures for the quality of mountain products.

3) Biomass opportunities in mountain areas - forestry and agriculture used as carbon sinks as a response to climate change

Biomass is a readily available source of renewable energy in mountain areas. Its use can promote the development of economic and tourism activities, help maintain the population and contribute to ensuring a quality of life that is comparable to that experienced in larger communities.

High management and transport costs, fragmentation of landholdings and depopulation are challenges for the effective use of mountain wood resources. However, the use of wood as a source of energy presents a valuable opportunity for giving new value and supporting the development of mountainous rural areas.

4) Exchange and identification of tools and recommendations to facilitate the setting of and adapting to hygiene and veterinary norms concerning primary and secondary production and direct sale

In order to guarantee the smooth implementation of hygiene and veterinary regulation it would be beneficial for the small producers to federate. Other measures it will be important to pursue include establishing a constructive dialogue among stakeholders, undertaking exchanges of experience in projects, developing consultation guides for good practices, providing adequate financial support and consultative services for the producers and processors, adaptation and development of traditional methods, training, outreach and awareness building of actors and general public.

There are large variations in the understanding and interpretation of health rules between countries and lessons to be learned from each other. INTERREG IVC is a good example of an instrument to establish actions to better manage the development of health standards in small-scale processing units in mountain areas across different countries and regions and its use for this purpose should be explored.

5) How to maintain population in mountain areas

Population is declining fast particularly in mountain areas in Central and Eastern Europe and some areas of Southern Europe. Loss of population is leading to land abandonment and loss of precious resources in mountain areas contributing also to the congestion of cities.

Economic factors are the driver of this negative demographic development. The lack of infrastructures, utilities and access to services such as education, health or culture in the mountain areas leads to the decrease of population in mountain areas.

In order to increase the population in mountain areas specific measures should be developed: educate people and maintain graduates in the region, develop programs specially designed for women and investment in infrastructure, utilities and support of basic services are examples.

It is important to provide new high skill jobs to the people but also to help them to find such work. An extra effort in the form of comprehensive strategies is necessary in order to maintain population in mountain areas. There is increasing competition between regions for people, the regions moving first and making this extra effort will be the ones that will secure the benefit.

6) Agricultural land: pressure in the valleys and management issues on pastures

Maintaining agricultural activity is a major challenge for Europe's mountains: the association between man and animal has shaped mountain landscapes and contributed to cultural and ecological diversity, and an exceptional heritage. The declining direct local economy affects the environment and mountain landscapes and other economic sectors, particularly tourism and social life of the valleys.

The main current obstacles to agro-pastoral activity are the unbalanced competition for land in the valleys with uncontrolled urbanization often linked to recent tourism activity and with an escalation of economic transactions, the fragmentation of land use that increases the management difficulties in the valleys and intermediate zones, competition for accessible and profitable lands and the difficulty of integrating agricultural professions especially in what concerns private property and agro-pastoral farming. Furthermore, pastoral land law is based, in great part, on a regional or national legislative framework, in the absence of communitarian legislation a great disparity persists in respect of the sustainability of the pastoral activity in Europe.

The "Land Bank" approach adopted in Asturias is an example of securing sustainable agro-pastoral activity by facilitating the administrative procedures for the transfer of land; restructuring farms; installation of young people in the region and by introducing a mediator to the process. The urban plan of the Province of Trento is an example of collective and stable land management existing since the XIII century, offering alternative income opportunities as a location for winter skiing and through the sale of timber. The Scottish Crofting system demonstrates a mechanism by which collective lands are relatively well protected from land pressure, the urbanization pressure is more targeted at small private landholdings

There are some examples of solutions for maintaining sustainable agro-pastoral activities such as the use of collective approaches, establishing a dialogue between the owners, managers and farmers, and public and private partnerships for the management of mountain spaces.