



Services of general interest in mountain areas

Recommendations to regional and local mountain stakeholders

What is Euromontana?

Euromontana is the **European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories**. Euromontana brings together organisations of mountain people: development and environmental agencies, agricultural and rural development centres, territorial authorities, research institutes, etc. It includes organisations from Western Europe as well as from Central and Eastern European countries with the aim of developing international co-operation. Currently 72 organisations from 17 wider European countries are members of Euromontana.

Euromontana's mission is to promote living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas.

In order to achieve this, Euromontana facilitates the exchange of information and experience among these areas by organizing seminars and major conferences, by conducting and collaborating in studies, by developing, managing and participating in European projects and by working with the European institutions on mountain related affairs.

The context

- The European Commission underlines that **services of general interest (SGI) play a major role in ensuring social, economic and territorial cohesion** throughout the European Union (*source: COM(2007) 724final*).
- In article 174 of the Lisbon Treaty **mountain areas are given a specific role when it comes to achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion**. Specific attention should be paid to mountain areas due to their permanent natural or demographic handicaps.
- In the 5th Cohesion Report it is confirmed that **access to services differs between thinly and densely populated areas** which could also be affirmed in a study that found that **largest gaps in the provision of SGI and the quality of the services can be found (...) in rural and peripheral regions**

Recommendations to improve access and delivery of services of general interest in mountain areas

1 Proactive approach of regional/ local actors

Municipalities, stakeholders and service providers should constantly search for innovative solutions to best provide SGI. The exchange of experiences through networks and contacts can be extremely fruitful in this respect.

2 Integrated and inter-municipal approach

The combination of different services is one way to improve their availability. But a new commercial center in a village may lead to the closure of a small shop in another village. This is why an inter-municipal approach is needed.

3 Demand orientation and participatory approach

When dealing with SGI, one important player is the consumers or beneficiaries. SGI should provide a minimum standard for all people all over a territory. This standard must evolve with the demands of the users. There is a need to find solutions in order to integrate the users into the process and thus better orientate the services to their real needs. A demand orientated approach requires participatory methodologies to identify the needs of the users.

4 Association of service providers

The provision of SGI depends also on service providers. Providers can be either public or private. When developing new forms of services, service providers should be closely associated to the work in order to create ownership and assure the sustainability of the actions.

5 Combination of services and temporal access

Combining services within a service center can help to provide better and more accessible services. This combination must not be restrained to SGI but can also include commercial services like a tourism office or a grocery shop.

6 Use of ICTs

It is of utmost importance that the potentials of new technologies are proactively investigated and used in mountain and rural areas. Cooperations with research institutes and support through public funding for technology transfer and innovation can be helpful in this respect.

7 Exchange of experience

The exchange of experiences is of utmost importance to spread knowledge on innovative approaches. A wide range of such practices can be taken from the complete version of the position paper.

For more information...

The Euromontana position paper is available [online](#) or upon request, writing to birte.vietor@euromontana.org

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