



EUROPEAN MOUNTAIN CONVENTION

“European Mountains Regions – A spirit of innovation”

Friday, 17th of September 2010

Declaration of Lillehammer

Taking full advantage of European mountains' innovation potential

Innovation is the art of turning an idea into a concrete realisation that answers the needs of population and businesses. Innovation can be scientific or technological but also incremental, organisational or social. It must promote a sustainable development, whether economical, social or environmental. Innovation does not have a territorial dimension, but the specificities of mountain territories, which represent around 36% of the Europe's area and 17% of its population¹, are assets for the implementation of innovations that are relevant for their development.

1) Preamble: Innovation is key to mountain sustainable development

We, political and socio-economic representatives from Europe's mountains, assembled here in Lillehammer on 17th September 2010, at a time of intense global crisis and policy revision, **call for recognition of the innovation potential that exists in mountain areas** and of the central role innovation can play in their sustainable development.

Innovation must be considered as being:

1. **a tool to address the structural challenges of the European society:** improve the competitiveness of companies, find effective solutions to face problems related to both ageing and mobile populations, answer the need for sustainable development, etc.;
2. **a tool to strengthen the regions and increase their attractiveness;**
3. **a strategy to increase resilience in the economic crisis and create a new growth and economic model** of development.

Hence, we consider that mountain people and businesses are particularly well placed to develop innovative solutions and new ideas because they are faced with specific challenges that require specific solutions such as:

- demographic changes,
- climate change,
- increasing international competition in both economies and access to markets,
- growing digital divide.

¹ „Europe's ecological backbone : recognising the true value of our mountains”, EEA report n°6/2010

We contend that these challenges are a great stimulus to creativity and that fostering innovation is the most promising way forward to address these challenges, thus contributing to economic diversification and to increasing competitiveness and attractiveness in sustainable ways.

We believe that innovations developed in mountains can be a source of inspiration and solutions for the rest of Europe.

2) Innovation is already vibrant in European mountain areas

Instances of innovation taking place in mountain areas are varied and numerous. We have presented and studied some of these during this convention. We can quote as examples: creation of opportunities for financing, establishment of business incubators, clusters between businesses, universities, public authorities and funders, the partnerships with cities situated in valleys or other regions to develop sales systems and remote distribution.

In one region, for example, a small cogeneration plant using woodchips has been built using a system for gasification of wood combined with an external combustion engine. This served as a catalyst to the creation of a partnership between different European countries.

Throughout mountain regions, the production of quality food products is now closely related to their place of origin. Producers and territories work together for their common communication and promotion. Thanks to well-known chefs, the value of local products has been recognized and they have been developed and distributed, thus generating substantial spin-offs in the local economy.

An increasing number of mountain producers have explored the opportunities of using information and communication technologies (ICT) to access larger numbers of distant consumers, often in large cities.

Innovation examples in public services are also numerous throughout Europe's mountains. From the innovative use of the ICT to the organisation of "multi-service stations" or "services buses", mountain people have shown that they can find clever and efficient solutions to constraints they encounter.

3) Mountain innovation still needs to be strengthened

The innovation process is not necessarily specific in mountains. However creating the conditions required for innovation may be more difficult. We emphasized during this Convention the importance of people and entrepreneurs. In mountain areas, as in other rural or remote areas, the density of businesses and population is lower than in cities, the number of high education facilities is smaller, access to infrastructure and services is more difficult and distances between companies, potential customers, research institutes and appropriate fund providers are often large. These factors result in challenges in organizing meetings and cooperation between actors and in achieving a smooth and intense circulation of ideas.

To allow innovation to reach its full potential in mountain regions, we call upon:

The European Union:

- **to continue supporting a broad approach to innovation in all its forms** and to promote this approach towards Member States and all organisations active in facilitating innovation;
- **to take into account the specificities of the mountainous, rural and sparsely populated areas** in the definition of policies that support innovation;
- **to continuously seek to simplify access to EU support programs**, and strengthen all instruments that can provide support in the form of project engineering, so that small businesses can benefit from existing policies;
- to integrate into all EU policies with a strong impact on mountains the elements needed to develop innovative approaches, especially:
 - through the Cohesion Policy:
 - **encourage cooperation between mountain actors** through long-term networking or short term projects,
 - **support the modernization of infrastructures** aimed at improving the accessibility and quality of life in the mountains;
 - in the context of the Common Agricultural and Rural Development Policy:
 - **strengthen research and development** regarding the efficiency of extensive grassland systems and traditional breeds,
 - **strengthen support to new forms of supply chain** (especially regional supply chains, multi-actors initiatives for valuing local products) **and new forms of product promotion and distribution** that increase the added value secured by mountain actors;
 - **Support the development, dissemination and implementation of innovation** through experimentation devices, training and appropriate advice and extension systems;
 - **steady and long-term support to** strong networks linking mountain inhabitants and facilitating human and professional interactions.
- to **measure the potential of innovation in mountain areas** through a series of indicators on the conditions and the success of the innovation process, adapted to these areas and at an appropriate scale.

National and regional authorities to foster the conditions required for the development of innovation in mountains and in particular:

- Education and training: **facilitate the creation of specific university branches and specialized training institutes in mountain areas**, with sufficient autonomy in definition of programmes and capacities to develop partnerships with businesses and population.
- ICT: **deliver to mountain actors guaranteed access, everywhere and in the same time frame, to the highest-speed broadband** required for interaction between people, companies, networks of actors, and the global community. Access to ICT should be included in the services of general interest.
- Services to population: **continue investing in the delivery and improvement of public services** in mountain areas to enable these regions to maintain their quality of life and remain attractive to young professionals and entrepreneurs interested to settle in mountain areas.

- Transport: **improve continually the capacity, the quality and density of transport network** in mountain areas so that movements and networking are facilitated both between mountain people and with their lowland and valleys counterparts.
- Energy: **support initiatives aimed at increasing energy efficiency as well as production and energy transport capacities** of these areas, thus fostering the development of specific solutions both adapted to mountain areas and transferable to other regions.
- Entrepreneurship: **provide greater support to mountain entrepreneurs** in their efforts to create a critical mass of 'providers' and 'customers', to enable them to better articulate their demand and supply and to meet the delivery and supply service needs; provide adequate business support systems.
- Procurement: **privilege innovative products and services in public procurement.**

Research and education institutions to:

- **increase their engagement** in the issue of innovation in mountain areas;
- **maintain an on-going dialogue with mountain stakeholders** regarding their needs and ideas;
- **undertake research studies** that respond to the needs of mountain actors;
- **establish partnerships with mountain actors** to ensure an effective transfer of know-how and technology;
- develop knowledge and collective intelligence regarding mountain areas.

Mountain actors in general to:

- **develop and encourage entrepreneurship;**
- **seize the opportunities offered by the financial support systems available** for developing innovation; take advantage of the European mobility opportunities offered to students and entrepreneurs;
- make use of opportunities offered by various networks, including social and professional networks, as well as the Euromontana network, to exchange experiences and engage in a process of mutual learning.

In order to encourage a spirit of innovation among mountain actors, Euromontana commits itself to implement an action plan contributing *inter alia* to:

- develop together with other partners a **resource centre** for the **dissemination of good practices of innovation;**
- encourage all international cooperation projects to disseminate the most relevant innovations;
- facilitate the access of mountain stakeholders to procedures and funding programmes that might help to foster the development of innovation in mountain areas.