



Being young in a mountain area in 2021

Tuesday 12th October 2021 from 09:30 to 12:30

Conference report

On 12th October 2021, Euromontana organised its annual conference on “[Being young in a mountain area in 2021](#)”. The event was the opportunity to highlight the needs and desires of young people for the future of the mountains. The conference, moderated by **Marie Clotteau**, Director of **Euromontana**, gave the floor to different mountain organisations that have recently surveyed the needs of young people, as well as to European and Alpine representatives who want to empower young people and better include them in the policymaking. Above all, the conference also featured young people who shared their views and projects for the future of the mountains.

Juanan Gutiérrez, President of **Euromontana**, opened the conference explaining that, 25 years after the creation of Euromontana and 10 years after the first European study on mountain youth, Euromontana decided to get back to young people in 2021 to understand their aspirations for the future of mountain areas.



Carried out with Euromontana members and with the support of [UNITA](#) and [Educ'Alpes](#), this study will provide food for thought to improve the quality of life of mountain youth in Europe. Young people are the future of mountain areas, he said, and it is therefore essential to maintain mountain areas vibrant and attractive.

Session 1: Young people in mountain areas: aspirations and challenges from all over Europe

The first session of the conference aimed at understanding the views of young people living in mountain areas. This session was opened by **Blandine Camus**, Communication and Policy Officer of **Euromontana**, who presented the main results from the European wide survey carried out by Euromontana from June to August 2021. 1134 questionnaires were collected from 22 countries.



The main message to take out from this report is that mountain areas are attractive for young people, 66% of them would like to stay living there, and even among young people who do not yet live in a mountain area, there is a clear attraction. The main motivations to live or settle in the mountains are the life close to nature and the quality of life. However, progress still need to be made, stressed Blandine Camus. Mountain youth in Europe is deploring the poor provision of public transport and of education in their regions. On the contrary, young people are satisfied with other services, such as access to the Internet or healthcare.

Beyond the requests for more mobility and education, the main demand from young people is more sustainability. More wilderness, environmentally friendly behaviour, and actions to tackle climate change are their top 3 priorities for their territory. Young people are aware of the natural heritage in mountain areas and want to preserve it, explained Ms Camus, but they do not only ask for more environmental sustainability as many of their concerns also deal with the socio-economic development of mountains. Tourism emerged as a key topic from Euromontana's survey: the transition towards more sustainable tourism is central in many of the studied countries and, in France and Italy, there is a criticism of a development model overly based on tourism, especially in winter. As a result, as Blandine Camus explained, young people complain about the proliferation of second homes, the increase in prices, the difficulty of finding a job in a sector other than tourism, and the fact that the services provided are only available during the tourism season. What young people demand is a dynamic region all year round, with adequate services for the local population and villages that are populated by permanent residents. Nevertheless, such critics do not mean young people are opposed to newcomers, on the contrary: they are at 68% in favour of welcoming new residents, in particular other young people and families.

There are interesting differences between countries, therefore Euromontana will publish by January 2022 a report analysing the results at European level as well as country factsheets. The results will also be used during the next [European Mountain Convention](#), on "Smart mountains: how to make our territories attractive and future-oriented?", which will take place on 25-26-27 October 2022 in the Italian natural park and biosphere reserve of Sila and where Euromontana is warmly inviting participants.

Idoia Arauzo, Coordinator of the Development and Dynamization Unit at the **Pyrenean Working Community** (CTP) also presented the main results from the ERASMUS+ [Trans-Pyrenean Youth Forum](#). In the past two years, the CTP has been working with the Pyrenean young people to better include them in the democracy process and policy making of the area, explained Ms Arauzo. With the support of European funds from the Erasmus+ programme, the CTP launched a questionnaire among young people living in the Pyrenees to identify their concerns and 553 answers were collected. The main concerns of young people, as specified by our speaker, have much in common with those identified through Euromontana's European survey. In the Pyrenees, nature and environment is the main issue for the youth, followed closely by social issues. Mobility and tourism were also among the concerns identified.



Results from this consultative process were then used during the Trans Pyrenean Youth Forum, which took place in Aragon (Spain) in October 2021. Thanks to direct discussions with institutional representatives of the Pyrenees, youth had the opportunity to address their concerns to policy makers. Ms Arauzo also explained that, after the Trans Pyrenean Youth Forum, young people set up thematic commissions to further reflect and came out with a manifesto. The main recommendations from these commissions were to make more efforts on young people's access to employment and housing, to further reduce racial discrimination and inequalities between men and women (in particular in employment and further use of inclusive language) and to improve communication about the cultural offer. The commission on environment also recommended to better consider mountain areas in energy policies, to improve forest management and consideration to native species, to enhance door-to-door sustainable mobility and gave the idea to create a big trans-Pyrenean natural park.

Youth is also the recent focus of [an Italian survey](#) carried out by **Riabitare l'Italia**. **Andrea Membretti**, researcher at the **University of Turin** and scientific coordinator of the survey, presented the main results from the survey, which focused on 18-39 years old people to understand their motivations for staying or leaving, grasp their



needs and promote local development projects led by young people. The main finding of the survey is consistent with the results obtained by Euromontana at European level, stressed Mr Membretti: 67% of respondents from Italy want to continue living in the mountains. Their main motivation is the proximity to the environment and the quality of life, followed by the community and social life and by the lower cost of living, detailed our speaker. For the 33% of young people who said they would prefer to leave, the main reasons are the opportunity for education of employment elsewhere followed by the lack of social and cultural services.

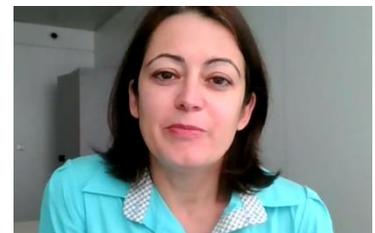
The researcher explained that the survey took place while the 2012 Italian Strategy for Inner Areas will soon celebrate its 10th birthday (inner areas represent 60% of the Italian territory, host 12 million people and more than half of inner areas are mountainous). Results will soon

be officially published and should drive action, added Andrea Membretti, such as development of pastoral schools, because researchers identified a tendency to stay for agricultural activities. Scouting and support for micro-entrepreneurship will also be developed to engage with young people and include newcomers.

Session 2: Answering to young people needs

The second session aimed at concretely knowing which schemes or institutional initiatives can address the needs of European youth. While the European Commission's President, Ursula von der Leyen, recently announced that the Commission will propose to make 2022 European Year of Youth, Euromontana invited **Biliana Sirakova, EU Youth Coordinator**, European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, to share the actions carried out by the European Union.

Ms Sirakova was appointed to this [newly created position](#) in June 2021, with the mission to better connect with young people and youth organisations and to make sure their perspectives are integrated across all relevant EU policies. In this regard, the EU Youth Coordinator reaffirmed that youth's concerns are not only related to youth policies but also to regional, health, climate, education, and employment policies among others. Although youth is more a competence of Member States, Ms Sirakova stressed that EU institutions have a role in encouraging cooperation between Member States, supporting and supplementing their actions. For instance, the Commission promotes mobility in Europe, youth involvement in cross-border cooperation and mutual-learning among countries.



The EU Youth Coordinator position was established in the [EU Youth Strategy](#), which is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, and Ms Sirakova's mission is to contribute to the implementation of this strategy. As explained by the EU Youth Coordinator, the strategy includes as annex [11 youth goals](#) designed by young Europeans, such as Moving rural youth forward, Quality employment for all, and the goal Space and participation for all. In this regard, she also welcomed the work carried out by EUSALP with the recently created Youth Council. The main youth participation mechanism is the EU Youth Dialogue, which is carried at EU, national and local level, and each cycle of the dialogue focuses on one or more of the youth goals. The outcome of the dialogue usually leads to the adoption of Council conclusions.

The European Union also develops other programmes for young people, recalled Ms Sirakova, such as mobility, learning, participation and solidarity opportunities through [Erasmus+](#) and the [European Solidarity Corps](#) programmes, which have had their budgets significantly increased. In addition, the [Discover EU](#) initiative gives 18-year-olds the opportunity to travel in Europe and the applications for 2021 opened on 12th October and are open until 26th October.

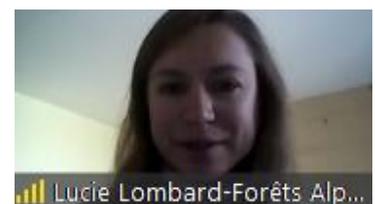
New initiatives are also underway, as explained by the EU Youth Coordinator. By the end of 2021, a new European legislation on micro credentials should be adopted, in order to encourage nonformal education and life-long learning. This is part of the goal to develop a [European Education Area by 2025](#). To cope with the important impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth, the European Union is also launching the new ALMA programme. Targeting young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), this programme will help them to find a work placement in cross border areas, specified Ms Sirakova. The Commission actively aims to encourage youth participation. The [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) and the [Manifesto](#) for young people by young people to shape the European cooperation policy are two examples of that.

Mountain organisations also play a role in the empowerment of the youth, as illustrated [Marion Ebster](#) from CIPRA international. The [CIPRA Alpine Change Maker](#) network is a community of 11 institutions in the 7 Alpine countries, which helps young people to reflect on their projects, meet up with others and together make a change for the sustainable future of the Alps.



Through the Alpine Changemaker Basecamp, a 3-year project launched in the summer 2021 in Switzerland, 30 young participants met during one week with 10 to 12 coaches and mentors from different disciplines. Thanks to peer-to-peer learning, coaching and workshops, participants develop their project. The idea for participants is to pick what they want to learn and choose their own mentor, explained Ms Ebster. Following the basecamp, participants can go through an individual mentoring programme for one year. One of the objectives is to create connections between local knowledge, innovative paradigms, research and development processes and creativity. Participants include people with both an academic profile, like students, and a practical profile, like craft makers. The Alpine Change Maker wants to valorise their knowledge and give them transformation skills to make them Alpine changemakers. In the end the basecamp hopes to come out with 60 young people, who want to develop 60 projects in 60 different places, specified Ms Ebster.

The goal of our conference was also to give the floor to mountain youth. [Lucie Lombard](#) was hence invited to introduce her initiative ["Association Forêts Alpines"](#). The project is mainly developed around Briançon, in the French Alps, where she lives and where she knows very well the territory. In the region, forests are essential



for the local economy, specific biodiversity, and leisure activities, explained Ms Lombard before adding that they are pressured by climate change. Because knowledge about forests is scattered and not promoted, the young woman wants to encourage the exchange of information between different stakeholders, like forest managers, farmers, hikers, and

tourists. The Association Forêts Alpines was created in September 2021, with the objective to promote knowledge exchange, to be a participatory science project and a local observatory of global changes' impacts on forest ecosystems. Lucie Lombard ambitions to develop different activities to raise awareness on mountain forests, like workshops on inclusive management of communal forests or forest walks and invited any interested participant to contact her.

Nicolas Rodigari, winner of the 2019 edition of [Pitch Your Project](#), also introduced his initiative **"Edelweiss"** to participants. While doing an Interrail trip in the Alps, he noticed that small shops in villages were selling many items from international production chains. His research showed that for 1 euro spent in



an internationalised product in a small village shop, 80 cents leave the area without creating any economic value in the region. Mr Rodigari is concerned about the consequences for local economy and craftsmen, who cannot compete with the low international prices, and for the environment, due to the impacts of international trade on carbon emissions. This young man thus developed the idea of the alternative currency **"Edelweiss"**, a local money that would be used in the Alps, on the model of already existing ones like the Eusko in the Basque country or the Stück in Alsace region. Such a currency would encourage people to buy local products, he said, and to maintain economic added value in the area. In the village of Tirano, the municipality is for example offering a "baby bonus" of 500 euros for each new-born; Nicolas Rodigari convinced the mayor to provide this bonus in the Edelweiss currency to encourage local consumption. However, local currencies are also social money, he explained, and the social distancing imposed by the COVID-19 crisis slowed down the development of the project. The ambition would be to launch the currency first in small Alpine villages, and then to upscale its use at cross-border level and even, why not, with Switzerland which uses the Franc.

This project won the 2019 edition of Pitch your project, an initiative developed by EUSALP, as explained **Pauline Treissac**, from region Bourgogne-Franche-Comté for the EUSALP French Presidency. The region wants to involved young people as much in the activities during the French Presidency, stated Ms Treissac.



With [Youth Shaping EUSALP](#), an initiative financed by the European Commission's DG REGIO, EUSALP developed the Pitch your project competition, which provides young people from 16 to 25 years old like Nicolas Rodigari with the chance to present their project for the sustainable development of the Alps and to receive funding. EUSALP also publishes online resources targeting the alpine youth and organises summer activities. Recently, the [EUSALP Youth Council](#) was also created: it gathers 27 young people from the 7 EUSALP countries who will have their voice on the decision-making process during the year of their mandate.

To learn more on this new initiative, [Achille Ribeyron](#), French member of the [EUSALP Youth Council](#), shared his story with the audience. He welcomed the personal enrichment brought by the experience, thanks to the exchange with people from different cultures and speaking different languages. He also stated that protecting the alpine biodiversity and to take concrete actions were his main motivations to apply as a member. The young student also shared his experience from the Youth Council kick-off meeting in Innsbruck, in August 2021, where members decided about their own organisation and formed 4 working groups to structure the coming work: economic development, mobility and connectivity, environment and energy, other projects. He summarised the work ahead as intense but valuable, as it also helps to learn debating despite the cultural differences.



[Isabelle Roux](#), Director of [Educ'Alpes](#), concluded this conference by reaffirming some of the main messages from the event: mountain areas are attractive for young people thanks to a rich environment and a good quality of life, but efforts on access to employment remain essential. She also welcomed the many initiatives currently being developed for and with young people, while also warning on a risk of fragmentation when synergies would be needed. The post-COVID context requires to keep in mind the aspirations of the youth and to invest in their potential to make them empowered mountain citizens, said Ms Roux before concluding “we should ask ourselves: what mountain will we leave to the young but also what young people will we leave to the mountain?”



You can also refer to speakers' presentations:

- [Blandine Camus's presentation on Euromontana's European survey on mountain youth](#)
- [Idoia Arauzo's presentation on how the Communauté de Travail des Pyrénées involves young mountain people](#)
- [Andrea Membretti's presentation on the research of Riabitare l'Italia about young people in Inner Areas in Italy](#)
- [Lucie Lombard's presentation about her association Forêts Alpines](#)
- [Nicolas Rodigari's presentation on his project Edelweiss for a local currency in the Alps](#)
- [Pauline Treissac's presentation about the involvement of young people in the activities of EUSALP](#)
- [Achille Ribeyron's presentation on his experience as member of the EUSALP Youth Council](#)