



Chapter 3: Main lessons learnt and conclusions: how can future regional development programmes contribute to improved attractiveness in 2014-2020?

PADIMA brings a lot of good news to the mountain areas.

The first good news is that many people are positive about living in mountain areas. And they will do provided they can combine the good quality of life associated with a natural and beautiful environment, with intense community life and with cohesive communities, with sufficiently modern infrastructures, services and work opportunities. This means it is possible to achieve territorial cohesion: it is even the will of a significant – and maybe growing- proportion of the European population. This is illustrated by the recent positive trends of population increase in several of the study areas, mainly due to in-migration: people returning from big metropolises or newcomers to the mountain areas. We must balance this message recalling that this positive recent trend comes after decades of depopulation and in areas where population density has fallen below critical levels.

The second good news is that there are plenty of good ideas out there in the regions of how attractiveness can be improved. We have tried to quote several examples of the 99 good practices identified by PADIMA and how these can be clustered into strategic approaches and key action lists targeting different target groups.

Now how can PADIMA outcomes contribute to better regional policies in the future?

The partnership has derived policy recommendations related to the three thematic activities on education and training, territorial marketing and economic diversification. We will not take the risk of oversimplifying these by quoting only some of them and encourage regional authorities to look into the newsletters and reports of these three themes. We would like to highlight however a few essential points and put them in relation with the priorities of EU2014-2020 policies and process envisaged for their implementation.

First and foremost, attractiveness of mountain areas depends on multiple factors. PADIMA has studied only some of them. Every region has its own identity, specificity, strengths and its own weaknesses. The demographic trends are not fully universal, nor are the assets of each region. An ex-ante diagnosis of the situation of the area, including demographic, economic, human capital and skills, perception, gender and age issues, is essential to formulating a sound strategy for territorial development. In that respect we recommend that the elaboration of territorial development strategies and partnership contracts for implementation of policies EU 2014-2020 relies strongly on prior territorial analysis.

This being said we observe that mountain regions share strengths that are quite clear in people minds and are related **equally to environmental and social positive attributes**. Territorial development strategies for mountain regions must secure hand in hand the preservation and smart and innovative use of the environment and the maintenance and development of modern mountain communities.

Both strong communities and beautiful environments provide a strong basis to build, restore and maintain **a positive image of mountain areas**. Working on territorial image and communication of this image via all sorts of media, including people themselves as ambassadors, or the diaspora of people originating from the mountain areas, must be at the core of any strategy for improved attractiveness. This must be organised with strong **involvement of stakeholders and cooperation between different levels of governance**: the whole community must recognised itself in the symbols and words adopted. Finally, gender issues and age-specific communication (young people, retired people) must be taken into account in a much bigger extent.

Then, policies must allow unleashing the development potential of these areas in various ways.

Creating the conditions for economies to function successfully and for people to live the modern way of life they seek is the first objective. This requires improvement of accessibility by transport and access to very efficient high-speed broadband networks. Internet can be the death of distance: it is most needed in the most remote parts of the territory. ICT are likely to solve many of the problems leading to depopulation: access to wider variety of education and training contents, visibility from



the other areas, access to e-services which cannot be provided physically for economic reasons (including health), access to culture, networking, easier relationships between people and businesses which are far away by road, improved communication towards tourists and potential migrants, territorial marketing etc...

All common strategic framework funds should be used to guarantee development and uptake of ICT by mountain people, companies and schools. This means that no cap should be put on the use of funding for development of broadband and that remote and sparsely populated territories should be central in the European digital agenda. Preventing the decline of public services is also essential and minimum service levels must be defined and respected. Solutions for cheaper, well adapted ways for service delivery must also be explored and once again, there are plenty of good ideas out there.

Then mountain development depends, as European development in general, on education, research and innovation. But the structure of the economy is specific as is the environment. To allow the full exploitation of mountain assets, to retain young students in mountain areas and to attract qualified people in mountain areas, it is essential to **support the existence of high-level education facilities and university branches in mountain areas.** We therefore recommend that member states and the European Commission insist on the **territorial dimension of knowledge creation and innovation** in the pursuit of smart growth.

As we have seen, diversification of employment opportunities is essential in mountain areas. It is a condition to meet young people and women career expectations and to attract working age population.

Policies must seek in that respect to **support diversification from traditional activities such as agriculture and forestry:** creation of new products, supply chains or new activities, different marketing strategies. We believe there is a great potential in that respect for **European Innovation Partnership** in the field of sustainable agriculture. Stronger marketing of mountain products and services is also likely to benefit the mountain areas, both directly (economic return) and indirectly (image improvement). Territorial branding associated with promotion of mountain assets should be a successful cocktail in that respect according to the EuroMARC Research project. In the definition of development programmes, authorities will have to adopt a targeted approach in that respect, selecting as best as possible the measures within European rural development and regional development regulations that are likely to bring the highest added value. All measures supporting collective approach and cooperation are likely to be beneficial.

But policies must seek also **more widely to encourage entrepreneurship development and creation of new types of businesses in general.** We learn from the good practices that this requires strategic thinking, infrastructures, and training. We have seen very interesting examples of practices targeting women innovation of young people innovation. All CSF funds will be needed to achieve these objectives and **Horizon 2020 will also have to support rural and social innovation widely.** We recommend that the ex-ante analysis carried out to elaborate programmes and partnership contracts draws and inventory of needs for support in this field. To facilitate this, regions must have the possibility to grant operating aid and investment aid to SMEs that start in mountain areas. The process of modernisation of state aids must take this into account, considering these SMEs rarely impact the single market.

Moreover, the links between education and economic sectors, between schools and employers must be strengthened, to match the gap between businesses needs and students expectations and foster innovation. Clusters, networks, all sorts of communications must be encouraged to ease the flow of information on education and job opportunities.

Finally, we strongly believe in the **importance of working in an integrated way**, across economic sectors, across generations, across “policy fields”, across the usual segmentation urban/rural. PADIMA confirms, if needed, that actions implemented in the framework of European policies must be included in a wider reflection, in an **integrated territorial strategy.** The proposals for European policies EU2014-2020 provide for a variety of integrated approaches that can be tailored for mountain areas: joint action plans, integrated territorial investments, rural development thematic sub-programmes and community-led local development. Regional authorities must examine these possibilities carefully to build **targeted regional policies for territorial development of mountain areas integrating the objective of greater attractiveness.**