

Closing the gap between science and practice. mountain.TRIP – an EU project coordinated by IGF

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**Project acronym:** mountain.TRIP

**Project name:** Mountain Sustainability: Transforming Research into Practice

**Programme:** FP7 Support Action 2009–2011

**Project leader:** Institute of Mountain Research: Man and Environment; Austrian Academy of Sciences

**Project partners:** Centre for Mountain Studies (Perth College UHI), Euromontana (Brussels), Ecologic Institute (Berlin), Jagiellonian University (Krakow), Mountain Research Initiative (Bern)

**Project duration:** 24 months

**Start date:** 01.12.2009

**Total budget:** € 846 997.98

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diversity. Mountains contain numerous key resources, provide ecosystem services to the mountain regions and the lowlands and thus are vital to the European population. They act as Europe's "water towers", supplying most of the freshwater and are an important source of renewable energy such as hydropower. They also offer a range of opportunities for recreation and tourism (Nordregio 2004).

Faced with global change, mountain geo- and ecosystems are very sensitive and hold many risks. Melting glaciers, changes in permafrost and in the altitudinal boundaries of vegetation, but also effects of political, economic and cultural globalization, plus demographic change, all present dangers for the mountain population. Mountain regions are frequently at risk of unsustainable development that does not protect the natural or social capital of these regions (Price 2007).

However, there might also be opportunities for the inhabitants and their regions if they manage to adapt to these changes in time. The European Union has understood the vital role of mountains and the potential of risks. For that reason, the European Commission has funded and initiated numerous projects in different Framework and Interreg programmes on change and adaptation strategies to ensure sustainable development in mountain areas. Research projects often produce valuable results, methods, tools and instruments, but at the end of the project neither time nor money remains to disseminate these results among practitioners and to the interested public.

### Introduction

In the course of Earth's history, Europe has experienced many geological processes, among them the Caledonian, Variscan and Alpine orogeneses which formed the mountain ranges we know today. These cover about 29% of the total area of the continent. Since the Agenda 21 and the declaration of 2002 as the International Year of the Mountains, their importance has increasingly been recognized by researchers, practitioners and the public. They are major centres of biological and cultural

## Project description

This is where mountain.TRIP starts. The project is funded by the European Commission's FP7 in the section "environment including climate change". The mountain.TRIP project will provide readily accessible and understandable forms of research-based information for stakeholders, end-users and practitioners and will close the gap between the different parties. The project will also break the link between environmental degradation and economic growth in order to contribute to sustainable development in European mountain regions. The scientific value of this project lies with the development of new communication tools (Fig. 1).

International cooperation is essential within this project, which will benefit from the experiences of the different countries. Lead partner of the project is the Institute of Mountain Research: Man and Environment at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Innsbruck. Appropriately, the project will be managed and coordinated in the "heart of the Alps". The IGF is responsible not only for the project management but also for the dissemination of results to researchers and practitioners. In order to reach young scientists and practitioners, new formats and instruments of communication are being developed. A social network, based on web 2.0 technology, short videos, a clearing house, teaching tools and manuals for practitioners are being set up. The enterprise social network of the mountain.TRIP community, provided by the mountain.TRIP web portal, is a place where scientists, researchers, practitioners, end-users and stakeholders meet to find, obtain and discuss research findings and mountain-related news. The Centre for Mountain Studies at Perth College, UK, has identified, assessed and evaluated projects from the EU framework programmes 4–6 and the relevant Interreg B programmes. They extracted 110 projects, allocated them to the following topics and analysed them for their practical relevance:

- agriculture
- biodiversity
- climate change

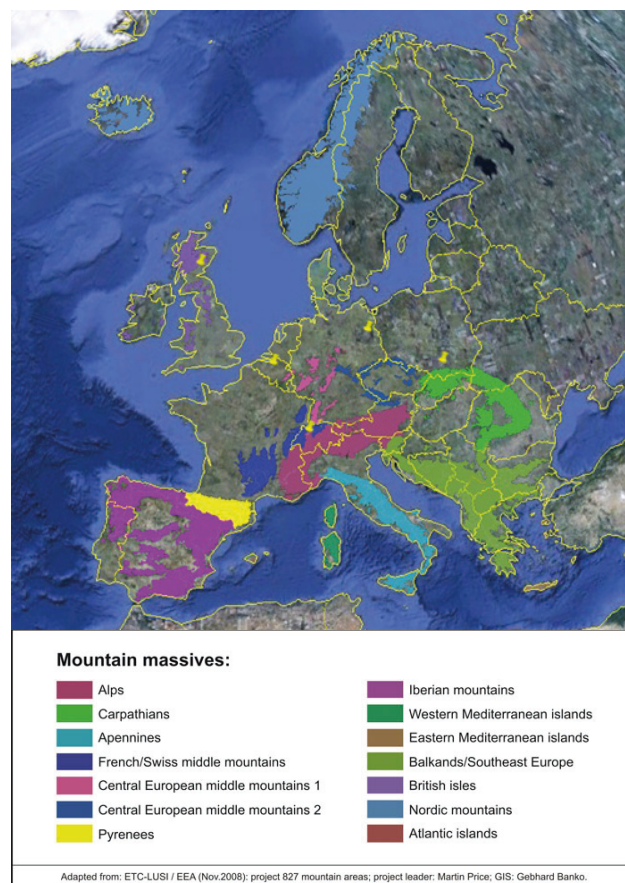


Fig. 1: Mountain massifs in Europe; Source: adapted from ETC-LUSI/EEA (Nov 2008) Project 827 mountain areas.

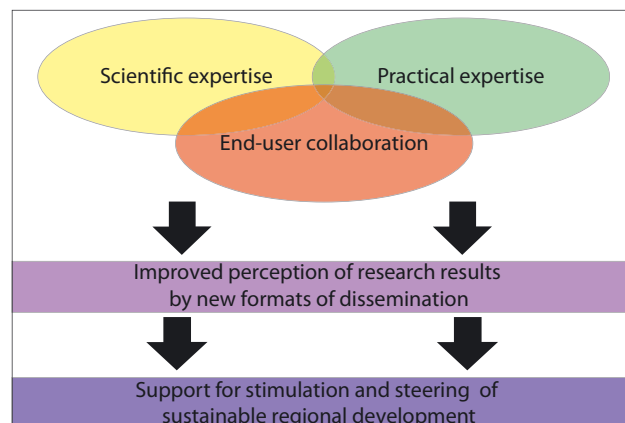


Fig. 1: The outcome of mountain.TRIP.

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- conservation
- cultural heritage and local knowledge system
- economy
- ecosystem function and services
- energy production
- environmental management
- forestry
- information technology
- land use/ land management
- natural hazards
- natural resources
- regional planning/ development
- social and political systems
- tourism
- transport and infrastructure
- water systems/ management

All the projects will be shown in the geoportal, a GIS application, designed and provided by the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and hosted on the mountain.TRIP portal.

Euromontana, from the leading mountain stakeholder association located at Brussels, will identify target groups at national level and develop a communication

strategy on their information needs for sustainable development in mountain regions. The relationship between the research results from the extracted projects and the groups of practitioners is an important step in the project. The question is what kind of products, formats and communication channels they need and want. This is where the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI) in Berne, Switzerland, comes in. This institution is responsible for developing the products from the research results of the selected projects. They will be tested in the workshops and the practitioners will be shown the different types: videos, twitter news, podcasts, leaflets, information sheets, new flashes. How, where and in what form the products will eventually be offered remains to be seen at the end of the project. Practitioners will decide what they need and want from this project.

Ecologic in Berlin, Germany, a think-tank for applied environmental research, policy analysis and consulting, is responsible for organizing the first round of workshops at national level. The first communication strategies and their products will be tested with practitioners at European level. After refining these products, the Jagiellonian University, Institute of Geography and Spatial Management in Krakow, Poland, will organize the second round of regional workshops in four different countries: Rumania, Poland, Spain and Austria.

The project aims to apply new information tools and communications technologies and develop them further. The focus is on methods with the objective of facilitating better use of EU project findings, contributing to improving human capital in mountain regions and initiating sustainable development processes.

The outcome of the project is made available to a wide range of practitioners through the website [www.mountaintrip.eu](http://www.mountaintrip.eu). The project applies the newest technologies, tools and services. Interaction between European and regional practitioners, policy-makers, civil society organizations, planners and any other end-users will be ensured through the workshops and via the portal.



*Fig. 3: The international mountain.TRIP team at the meeting in Innsbruck, May 2010. Photograph by Valerie Braun.*

Fides Braun



Fig. 4: The role of the mountain.TRIP project.

## Conclusion

mountain.TRIP intends to close the gap between theory and practice, between scientists and practitioners, making the results of EU-funded projects accessible and useful for strategies of sustainable development in European mountain regions. Its contribution to basic research is the development of new communication instruments in order to reach as many practitioners as possible. Leading university and research institutes, communicators and networking institutions collaborate in this project and initiate a bottom-up strategy, based on the real needs of those who may apply research results in their daily practice of policy making, regional planning, ecological protection, social coherence and economic growth to turn the European mountains into model regions of sustainable development (Fig. 4).

Initial results are available on the web at <http://www.mountaintrip.eu>. All readers of this book are invited to join the mountain.TRIP community by registering on this homepage.

## References

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