

Economic, Social and Ecological Development of a European Mountain Region (Karpatenprojekt)

Abstract

The project's aim is to identify strategies for a **sustainable development of the Carpathian Mountains**, a mountain range extending from Central-Eastern to South Eastern Europe, and to accompany and support the realization of these strategies on the spot. The central activity will be the development and implementation of a trans-national network of **mountain huts and paths**. A **sustainable development and marketing concept** must be designed for this tourism enhancing project, the resulting **job-creating effects** and necessary **qualification measures** must be identified and their implementation promoted.

Network

Practical implementation partners are:

- FUTOUR Umwelt- Tourismus- und Regionalberatung
Waltherstr. 29, 80.377 München (Germany)
- Naturfreunde Rumänien
Piata Huet 16, RO-550182 Sibiu (Rumania)
- Siebenbürgischer Karpatenverein
G-ral Magheru Str.Nr. 1, RO-2400 Sibiu (Rumania)

Academic partners in Rumania are:

- Universitatea Babes-Bolyai Cluj-Napoca, Fakultät für Geografie
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In addition, a co-operation with the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps – CIPRA (Vaduz), the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention (Innsbruck) and the German Alpenverein (Munich) is planned.

Main Goals

The core of this project is **planning and implementing an improved mountain hut and path structure** in the Carpathian Mountains and building a network of existing initiatives with similar aims in the individual regions. The vision of a **via carpati** running through the whole Carpathian arc and linking eight European countries will be the basis for a sustainable mountain tourism resulting in comprehensive development opportunities for the mountain regions and will create new job and qualification opportunities for the resident population in many areas (maintenance of the paths; management of the huts; accommodation and shops in the valleys; information, advice and guides for hikers and mountaineers).

This results in the following modules:

- Developing concepts for extending the existing network of mountain paths
- Developing concepts for refurbishing existing huts and building new huts
- Promoting activities aimed at improving the valley infrastructure in the region (accommodation, shops, public transport)
- Building a generally accessible information network concerning huts, paths, accommodation in the valleys and means of transport
- Identifying job opportunities and necessary qualification measures for the areas mentioned above (hut personnel, maintenance people for the paths, mountain guides, ranger, youth group leaders etc.)
- Developing and implementing qualification measures
- Promoting the exchange of experiences with other European mountain regions, particularly the Alps.
- Promoting a network of people involved and organisations

These modules will be realised in 3 pilot projects. The selection will be the first step in a **trans-disciplinary approach** (close integration of conception and practical implementation).

Expected Results

The sustainable development of a mountain region, i.e.:

From an **economic perspective**

- Strengthening a sustainable economy based on tourism

From a **social perspective**

- Creating new jobs and developing qualification measures to professionalize activities in connection with a sustainable tourism concept
- Stabilising the network between people involved and organisations
- Improving user access to information about tourist infrastructure (accommodation, paths, traffic)
- Ensuring continuity in the exchange of experiences between European mountain regions

From an **ecological perspective**

- Stabilising an ecologically sensitive territory by promoting a sustainable tourism as a new economic factor

Connection to European and National Regional Development Activities

The project aims to continue the work of **existing initiatives** in the region. In addition, it takes up the comprehensive experiences gained in the Alps, a territory with many similarities. Particularly important is the **Alpine Convention**, an agreement bound by international law between the bordering states and the EU to ensure a sustainable development in the whole alpine region. A key objective of the project will be to advance regional and local activities in individual countries and their **integration within the Carpathian region** as well as to promote and intensify the **exchange with the players in the alpine region** and the EU.

Other Considerations

The starting point of the project is the fact that to date there have hardly been any joint measures for a cross national regional development in the Carpathian region. In the past, the countries in this region were insulated from each other to a relatively high degree because of strong political differences, even if Western Europeans tended to view them as a uniform “Eastern Block”. The development of their common mountain region plays an important role in the economic restructuring of these countries with the close interdependencies of economic, ecological and social aspects being of particular importance.

The bordering countries of the Carpathian region (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary as new EU members; Rumania as a prospective member and the Ukraine), in their implementation of sustainable regional development concepts will be able to profit from the relevant experiences made in other European regions, particularly the alpine region. The integration of the activities for a sustainable development in the bordering countries in this region is relatively far advanced. It must be said, however, that there is hardly any target-oriented exchange between the alpine and the Carpathian regions to date. The project therefore is also designed to promote and strengthen these processes.

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