



## A Pilot Project for Mountain Sustainable Development

*The mountain regions in Europe face many of the challenges of regional development and the need for a balanced development is particularly urgent in mountain areas. They are naturally situated on borders since mountains make up a divider between nations, and the environment is fragile with special climatic and biologic conditions. PRO MONTE helps the mountain regions to overcome obstacles to cooperation and work for a sustainable development.*

Mountain regions, like insular and sparsely populated regions, face cultural diversities and challenges on social and economic integration. The environment is often characterised by special climatic and biological conditions, not the least of which concern water management issues. Hopefully there are solutions to find for some of the urgent challenges, and also generate research and knowledge for other disadvantaged areas in Europe, on cross-border as well as interregional and transnational cooperation. The urgent need to find means of sustainable development for mountain areas in the short term gives PRO MONTE the character of a pilot project.

PRO MONTE aims at evaluating best practice procedures regarding cooperation in mountain sustainable development and to decrease the border obstacles in mountain areas. This INTERACT Project has finished the definition of evaluation criteria that is now the basis for analysis and identification of best practices. The second aim of PRO MONTE is to achieve geographic and thematic focus to help mountain regions find a model of sustainable development and to strengthen cooperation on mountain issues between local authorities and private development players.

For 2007-2013, the proposed strategy for ERDF programming can encourage a number of advances in terms of European, national and regional governance. The authorities within mountain areas intend to encourage local and regional, or even inter-regional and national discussions. This must apply concerning management, particularly of the objective of territorial cooperation. That means that a debate must take shape about the arrangements for management of the cross-border and transnational cooperation funds. At local, regional, cross-border or transnational levels, it is desirable to consider the proposals from Mountain Range Committees, Working Communities and any institutions working in parallel on these natural frontiers constituted by mountain ranges.

So the proposal to transform the Community Initiative Programme INTERREG into a real objective bodes well for strengthening the intra-European social capital; this issue corresponds to the needs of economic, natural and cultural regions to have access to the means for their self-development or endogenous development.

Along these lines, the proposal to establish a European Cross-border Cooperation Group (ECCG) represents a considerable step forward in favour of cross-border cooperation and its long-term continuation. The territorial authorities are suffering today from a lack of resources other than the unwieldy and complex structure of the EEIG to move beyond the project stage and maintain continuing cooperation. To do that, the ECCG must be supported, through this improved proposal which gives more detail and clarifies the idea.





Moreover, the initial results of the Interact Pro Monte project appear to confirm the absolute necessity of having cross-border and transnational cooperation areas that are consistent with geographical areas and with mountain ranges in particular. While zoning can go beyond them and incorporate towns in the foothills, it remains true nevertheless that this consistency with mountain ranges is necessary for programmes to be effective. Likewise, greater coordination between this Community policy and international conventions (Alpine Convention), working communities (CTP, CTJ, CAFI, ArgeAlp, etc.) and national or inter-regional mountain policies is absolutely necessary. Likewise, the choice of themes for cooperation and the potential participants are also essential to the efficiency of this policy of territorial cooperation. How, for example, can one fail to see these days the obvious links that should exist between INTERREG III B Alpine Area and the Alpine Convention? Geographical coherence and thematic coherence are the keys to the success of this cooperation objective. It is of the utmost importance in future to have coherence of zoning, objectives and ultimate beneficiaries depending on the territory covered.

It seems particularly important that this future objective of territorial cooperation can contribute as much efficiency as possible and lead to the outline of a European mountain policy which is strongly coherent and strictly necessary. Cross-border, transnational and inter-regional exchanges are essential to enhance the social capital, for the dissemination of good practices and to capitalise on the assets that will allow sustainable endogenous development.

The lead partner AEM (European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Areas) is a gathering of elected representatives and local and regional authorities from mountain areas, which seeks to create a proactive, dynamic network on mountain region issues that can increase the integration of the mountain perspective in European public policies.

#### Fact box

#### **PRO MONTE**

**Lead partners:** AEM – European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Areas (France)

**Partners:** IREALP (Italy), Euromontana (France), ADECOHD (France), General Council of Savoy (France), Autonomous Province of Trento (Italy), Province of Belluno (Italy), Province of Granada (Spain), ZDANIE (Greece), Prefecture of Lasithi (Greece), Municipality of Itamos (Greece)

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