

Mountainous Environment Enhancement and Protection: The Example of The Mountainous Village Nymphaio in Greece

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of “mountainous environment enhancement and protection”, while providing a study on the revival of a mountainous village on the mount of Vernon (Vitsi), Prefecture of Florina : Nymphaio.

The aim of this paper is to record – to the extent which this is possible – the current reality of mountainous areas both in Europe and in the region of Greece, and to critically examine the results of pertinent development and protection endeavours which have been made so far or are currently being made. The ultimate goal is to identify the problems, disadvantages or weaknesses of mountainous areas and to establish guiding lines and specific measures and proposals for the integrated development of these areas. Nymphaio in the prefecture of Florina, Greece, was selected as study area; a traditional settlement listed as preservable, located at an altitude of 1,346m on Vitsi. The development of the present study is divided into three parts; in the first one it is attempted to record the natural and socio-economic reality of the mountain areas in Europe and in Greece and to present the development policies aimed at the sustainable development and protection of these areas. The second part deals with the analysis of the specific study area, the Community of Nymphaio, Florina prefecture, and the examination of all the parameters which led to its revival. The study concludes with the third part, which puts forward strategies and measures for a “sustainable” and integrated development of mountainous areas.

Keywords: Natural and socio-economic reality of mountainous areas, Sustainable development, traditional settlements, Nymphaio.

1. Introduction

The mountainous and semi-mountainous regions of Greece and of the whole of Europe, as human geography and administration units, have throughout history developed and put forward their own social, economic and cultural identity. Even at the most difficult and unfruitful historical moments their human resources demonstrated amazing self-motivation and great organizational and functionality achievements in all aspects of life.

In recent years though, the overall conditions of the surrounding geopolitical space, with the intense political and social impacts and turmoil which left their mark on the country, led to the disruption of the mountainous and semi-mountainous areas. The second world war followed by the civil war, the division of population on political and ideological terms, persecutions, interference and interventions of foreign powers, dictatorship, emigration, urbanization, were the causes and consequences for the extensive urban depopulation mostly of the mountainous areas.

The economy of the mountainous parts of the country gradually went into decline due to the new orientations of the economic life in Greece. The industrialized production to meet new needs on a massive scale, new consumer needs and the new lifestyle adopted by the modern Greek of the 60s, meant that mountain areas had a very small margin to develop their potential.

In the following decades, mountain areas were depopulated to a great extent and could not keep abreast with the overall developmental changes that took place in the Greek region.

Comparatively, they have demonstrated even up to today, a blatant languishing bordering desolation.

The aim of this paper is to record – to the extent which this is possible – the current reality of mountainous areas both in Europe and in the region of Greece, and to critically examine the results of pertinent development and protection endeavours which have been made so far or are currently being made. The ultimate goal is to identify the problems, disadvantages or weaknesses of mountainous areas and to establish guidelines and specific measures and proposals for the integrated development of these areas.

2. An introduction to mountainous regions

In comparison to other Continents, Europe occupies a wide range of extremely differentiated mountainous expanses, starting from the arctic zones, passing through the Alps and other mountain massifs in regions of temperate climate and descending to the Mediterranean. Mountain areas covering approximately 38.8% of the overall expanse of the E.U., whereas they include an exceptional wealth of vital resources for the entirety of Europe: water reserves, forests, rare species and habitats, unique cultural origins, rest and refuelling areas etc (European Commission 2004).

Mountain areas are characterized by their distinctive geomorphological environment, which significantly affects their economic and social development conditions. These areas, once active population centers, have been facing problems of demographic desolation and of economic withering in the last decades (Kyritsis et al 2004). The poorly accessible mountain massifs are currently exposed to a greater or lesser degree to marginalization mechanisms and the solution to the problem lies in supporting sustainable development by introducing and preserving economic activities harmonized with the expectations of the community (Giannopoulos 2001, Commission of the European Communities 1992).

The specific conditions in disadvantageous mountain areas are shaped by a cycle of interaction between economy, society and development (Nepal 2002). These conditions, such as low usage of natural resources, insufficient infrastructure, stagnation of agricultural production, high setup costs of entrepreneurial activities, low productivity, high transportation costs, in combination with low population density, lead to a disproportionately high cost endeavour (with regards to its result), which presupposes a high public monies expenditure per capita on infrastructure and services (Dologlou 2008). It is thus created a cycle of negative interactions of under-development, limited opportunities, reduction of natural and human resources, further decline in growth and development opportunities, which leads as mentioned previously to a declining demographic tendency (Kyritsis I. et al 2004).

It is thus that mountain settlements, with small size economies, remote and isolated in relation to contemporary economic activity of the periphery are constantly witnessing the dwindling of their population, of their economic activity and infrastructure, which defines economic prosperity. The overall human potential is reducing at a faster pace than in other regions, as residents migrate to larger cities and villages looking for employment and better services and infrastructures (Commission of the European Communities 1992). The continuous reduction in population and human potential, as well as the low educational level, result in a dramatic lack of innovative initiatives and in the use of obsolete traditional methods of agricultural production. The lack of employment positions in local businesses, the difficulty of the agricultural population to maintain a satisfactory level of quality of life exclusively through their agricultural income, and the inadequacy of the communications network connecting these areas with administrative and economic centres, compose a negative social environment (Kyritsis I. et al 2004).

However, the drawbacks just mentioned occur in varying intensity within mountainous areas. In fact, the more disadvantageous these areas are, the more significant their primary production is for their economic and social structure. These disadvantages, which are the main cause of a lack of development and the low level of quality of life, are outweighed to an extent by cultural heritage, with its singularities and traditions, by an attractive natural environment and ecological wealth.

Following the initiatives developed towards this axis over the last years for an integrated sustainable development in remote mountain areas, the phenomenon of settlements being resided by aged population mostly- or even their desolation and of certain villages being visited only as summer resorts, has come to a standstill. Wherever it was made possible to develop new economic activities based on initiatives by the intrinsic human potential, supported through national and EU funding, there resulted a containment of the population with structures which open a new perspective of local development (Andriotis 2008, Rokos 2004, Tsaur 2006, Ministry of Rural Development and Food 2007).

With regard to Greece, the relief morphology is characterized by three basic features :

- The natural fragmentation of the continental part (unconnected spatial units of small size)
- Island complexes, and
- Mountain massifs

The mountainous space, which covers approximately half the surface of the country, has had an outstanding role to play throughout the historic and economic development phases of the country. Despite the historic origins and the self-sufficiency which characterized the mountain space for long period of time, during the twentieth century the Greek population migrated in massive numbers to lowland areas and urban centres, especially during the first post-war decades. These mountain areas, without basic infrastructure and dynamic productive employment, were led to economic withering and desolation.

Nevertheless, the mountain space has witnessed – especially during the last decades – significant development – not necessarily uniform – resulting from an overall developmental process in the area of economy and the significant structural changes that have taken place in the areas of agriculture, livestock, tourism, and also due to urban centres development, in direct or indirect function of the development of transportation networks and infrastructure in general. It is a fact though, that the mountain space includes features of deconstruction of the inhabitation processes and of production (Giannopoulos 2001).

Certain mountain areas have demonstrated distinctive elements of development dynamics during the last decade, mainly due to the saturation of coastal areas, the increasing demand for holiday retreat residence, the improvement of transportation and communication networks, the increasing potential of the middle class for weekend retreats, and to the imported lifestyle for alternative forms of tourism.

In antithesis, there are several mountain areas which lag behind significantly and where the phenomenon of desolation and demographic shrinkage continues. In these areas, expanses and cultivated land of marginal yield are abandoned. These expanses are not rendered to other uses, intensifying thus the problems of mountain areas.

3. Existing policies and new directions in developmental planning

It is worth mentioning that prior to 1992, there was hardly any interest in applying any specific policy concerning mountain regions, in most countries in the world. The significance of mountain space on an international level was recognised by most of the political leaders in the Rio Summit Conference in 1992, when specific action started to be adopted through national and international developmental projects. This also becomes obvious from the fact of including a

specific chapter (chapter 13) about mountains into the renowned “Agenda 21” – concerning the action plan which resulted from the UN conference in Rio, on environment and development.



Fig. 1: Map of general orientation

The significance of mountain space on an international level was even more recognised recently, with the declaration of the year 2002 as the international year of mountains.

The European Commission and as a consequence the Greek state, had not until the 3rd Community Support Framework adopted any specifically targeted strategy about mountain space; they were integrated through horizontal actions into various projects on rural areas which needed to be developed in parallel with and in addition to urban centres to achieve a balanced development of the community space which leads to economic and social consistency.

During the 3rd Programming Period, in the frameworks of the Operational Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development 2000-2006, and of the 13 Regional Operational Programmes, there were applied for the first time, Integrated Programmes for Rural Development for the sustainable and integrated rural development, rural population retainment, the protection of natural and manmade environment and of the natural resources and the augmentation of agricultural income with the development of alternative forms of employment in distinctly demarcated mountainous and disadvantageous areas.

In the 4th Programming period, through Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, new measures and actions will be applied, aiming at the economic, social and cultural rural upgrading, so as to ensure its economic self – sufficiency, the protection of the environment and the salvation and preservation of cultural heritage features. The application is mostly on areas of integrated intervention as defined in the 3rd Community Support Framework.

In addition to the Programmes mentioned, the Community Initiatives (Leader+, Interreg) are

active, whereas in the direction of an integrated planning of a geographical (and not administrative) entity, this of the North and Central mountain range of Pindos which is a pilot scheme of the “PINDOS” National Project.

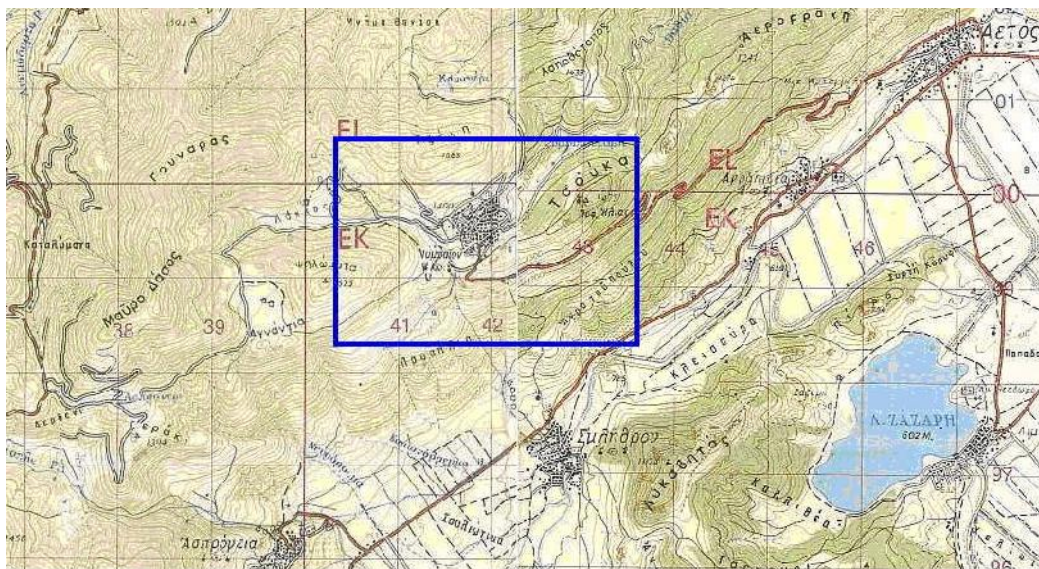


Fig. 2 : Settlement location



Fig. 3 : Aerial photo of the wider area of the settlement in 1945

4.The enhancement of mountain areas through paradigm : The Nymphaio region

It is common knowledge that no programme or development measure has any chance of success unless the local community is convinced about it and thus supports it.

It is likewise with Nymphaio; this beautiful settlement in Florina prefecture which is now taken pride on, would probably have the same fate as other desolated mountain villages of the same area, if, in a critical period of time (1994), some natives had not taken the initiative to realize their vision for the revival of this historical place (Loustas 2002).

The village of Nymphaio is situated in the south part of the Florina prefecture, of the West Macedonia region (Figures 1,2,3). It is built at an altitude of 1,346m on the east slope of the Vernon mountain (Vitsi). It has a de jure population of 211 and de facto population of 413 (EL.STAT. 2001). The Nymphaio Community is par excellence a “forest” community since 74% of the area is covered by high forests while cultivated land covers a very small percentage (2.50%).



Fig. 4 : Nymphaio at the beginning of the century.

The research geographic area of Nymphaio, one third of whose expanse (8,524 stremmas) corresponding to its western part, belongs to the NATURA 2000 area and has been registered in the Greek habitats of the CORINE European programme. Furthermore, the area of Nymphaio has been classified in the Outstanding Natural Beauty Sites according to the “Border definition and definition of protection measures for the Sites of outstanding Natural beauty” of the Ministry for the Environment, Physical planning and Public Works (1996-1999), whereas it has been identified as a preservable historic site and a preservable traditional settlement (Fig. 4). In the wider area there are remarkable natural, cultural and environmental resources. The Heimaditida – Zazari lakes are a significant wetland habitat which is included in the national inventory of the Natura 2000 areas, outstanding natural beauty sites, museums, monasteries, churches synthesize an ample and fascinating diversification of environmental and cultural values. Furthermore, several cultural events take place throughout the year, such as cultural festivals, revival of old customs, offering at the same time hospitality and traditional local dishes.

Between 1385 – 1912, Nymphaio belonged to the Ottoman empire as an autonomous town of latin speaking (Vlachs) Greeks of the upper class. Between 1630 – 1930 and for three centuries, Nymphaio excelled as a center of silver-goldsmiths. Its prosperity in the 19th century

through the interwar period is mainly due to the native cotton and tobacco merchants, trading with Egypt and central Europe. Greek education was significantly developed, the usual resident population amounted to 3,000 and the town which was at a high altitude on the mountains boasted of an integral network of cobbled streets, sewerage / drainage and lighting services.

During the first half of the 20th century, Nymphaio took part in eight successive wars. After its liberation and then its integration into the Greek state in 1912, there was a dramatic change - as happened everywhere - in the economic, communication and international trade conditions. There was thus a gradual desertion of the place starting from 1932, and by 1980 Nymphaio had been completely deserted. The houses which had not collapsed were left derelict, moss had begun to grow on the streets and approximately 45 residents all elderly remained, being left without prospects.

During this decline (late 80s), Nymphaio was identified by the state as preservable traditional settlement and preservable historic site - which then seemed like a tragic irony. Right at this point in time, which was later considered as a landmark in the history of the settlement, some descendants of this village who had been scattered in other towns, decided to visit their paternal homes during weekends and restore them, creating thus a small lively weekend community. They took over the community administration with a view to reviving their ancestors' village and leading it to a mild development by using the potentials of European and national programmes and the local human resources. The main objective has been the sustainable development of this historic settlement through mild intervention, adjusted to the environment of the region, as well as the protection and enhancement of their cultural heritage.

Nymphaio at this point did not - and could not - have its silver-goldsmiths or its trade anymore. It never had a remarkable primary production anyway. What it did have was its past, a brilliant cultural heritage and pure unadulterated Nature of outstanding natural beauty, which owing to its abandonment, has never been interfered with. This heritage has had to be preserved, enhanced and developed, in order for Nymphaio to be revived, through its reconstruction. A youthful and dynamic society has to be created, as well. Consequently, there had to be new employment positions, a satisfactory income and a strong feeling of hope in order to attract young people who lived elsewhere. It was also important to dispel a certain feeling of isolation in a village which was then remote and buried in the snow for almost five months a year ; in other words, a continuous flow of visitors was essential. All this could only be accomplished through ecotourism, which should be radically different from the established one, mild enough to respect the place's heritage, non-competitive outside the community borders, but complementary to the wider area.

The basic axes of this strategic plan towards the attainment of its goals, are:

- Respect and enhance the unique architectural heritage of the overall morphology of the settlement, in accordance with its tradition and history, which means restoration of all of the old houses and the erection new ones according to this tradition.
- Respect and enhance the nature of Nymphaio, which should be achieved through the organic connection between the surrounding nature and the settlement, the continuous flow of visitors - tourists into this nature by creating visiting sites and through Nature development (USDA 1995).
- The overall reconstruction of the traditional town planning web under preservation, with the gradual reconstruction of the dilapidated cobbled streets, after the installation of underground facilities networks (water - drainage - sewerage - telecommunications - traditional central lighting). There should also be an implementation of certain architectural characteristics and regulations for the houses under reconstruction and erection.
- The connection of Nymphaio with the Florina - Kastoria - Prespes triangle by constructing two forest roads : Nymphaio - Hydrousa and Nymphaio - Perikopi - Polykeraso. In this way

the whole critical mass of visitors – tourists will be divided into these bidirectional itineraries through the mountain complex of Vitsi. Also, the development of the entire mountain complex with its settlements.

- Lastly, the continuous and reliable raising of public awareness and the promotion of the settlement through the distribution of thousands of brochures, community publications about Nymphaio, permanent exhibitions, hosting of VIPs, TV coverage of important events, production and presentation of documentaries and informative publication material in newspapers, magazines and the radio.

4.1. Prioritization of actions

Expectedly, all these actions did not occur overnight, but gradually within a few years (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 : Contemporary view of Nymphaio

The prioritization of works and actions was as follows :

- 1st – Technical Infrastructure : new aqueducts, drainage/sewerage networks, a powerful peripheral power network, sophisticated telecommunications through an underground network, new cobbled streets, a street cleansing system, and uninterrupted snow removal within the settlement. A road on the perimeter of the settlement and comfortable parking sites at the two ends of the village as well as at its centre.
- 2nd – Enhancement of the cultural heritage : Conference Educational Centre of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki at the imposing Nikeios School, an extensive library and permanent photography exhibition on the bygone world of the village. A silver-goldsmith and History museum. An open stone amphitheatre of 300 seats, at an altitude of 1500m, making it the highest constructed amphitheatre in the Balkans. Restoration of the historical three-aisled basilica of St. Nicolaos. Community guesthouse and medical centre.
- 3rd – Protection and enhancement of the Natural wealth : European Centre for the protection

of the Brown Bear open to visitors, a YMCA of Thessaloniki mountain centre, a Wildlife and Outdoors Recreation Park with deer and many rare species in an expanse of 1,800 stremmas. A community horses stable with twelve thoroughbreds from the Alps for serious riding or easy trailing. Designated trails. Construction of an artificial lake- wetland habitat.

- 4th – Society – the Human factor : tight social cohesion and solidarity, revival of traditional festivals and celebrations but avoiding a folklore character, traditional weddings and excursions. Basketball and tennis courts. Establishment of AKEMEKAN (Purely Municipal Enterprise for Construction studies and Development of Nymphaio), which administers the municipal forest, the Nikeio School, the museum, the municipal stable with its riding and easy trailing horses, it conducts publications, holds exhibitions and events, elaborates studies, etc.
- 5th – Communications : Continuous flow of information to the community members, as well as occasional publicity to objectively cover a specific important event. Tens of thousands of informative printed material. Quality books publications on the tradition, history, folklore and society of this historic settlement. Production of documentaries and cd roms.
- 6th – Solidarity – Cooperation : Spreading of the tourist flow throughout the wider area and Cooperation Network with the traditional Communities of Greece and the adjacent Municipalities.

4.2. Means of management and realization of the strategic plan

In the framework of the strategic plan realization all available potential of Nymphaio was made the best of. The community achieved economic viability by the sustainable management of its timber wealth from its forests and was thus enabled to save the necessary funds in order to participate in European programmes. Concurrently, by presenting its strategic plan and its beautiful location, it levied all its human resources within and outside the settlement.

The overall effort and vision attracted many. At least seven freelance civil engineers, architects and electrical-engineers conducted ten complimentary studies. The public electricity and telecommunications enterprises were immediately mobilized. The Thessaloniki YMCA set up a summer youth village through donations, in the municipal forest where the European centre for the protection of the Brown Bear was also set up by the non-profit organisation Arktouros. The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Thessaloniki Municipality assisted with the effort, as well as several entrepreneurs from Thessaloniki, with their donations. The Greek media provided large publicity in every step of the way. Three important benefactors, one of whom does not have a descendent from Nymphaio, who deposited considerable sums of money, as well as many others who through their donations made their own contributions in money, heirlooms or even plots of land. The Nymphaio expatriates and even “foreigners” reappeared and restored their old houses or built new ones, all in complete harmonization with tradition, while the women of the community set up a production commercial cooperative with home made sweets, handiworks, foods, etc.

Concurrently, all funding opportunities were taken advantage of, from European and National Programmes (CSF, Leader, the Special Funding for the Implementation of Urban Planning schemes – ETERPS, EPTA, THESEAS, PINDOS) as well as from Ministries funding (Ministries for urban planning, physical development and public works, Agriculture, Ministry of Macedonia- Thrace) and from local Administration (Southeast Florina, Southeast Kastoria).

The outcome of the above interventions and actions was the creation and operation of sixteen guest houses of equal size (20 bed capacity) in traditional residences, five restaurants, three cafeterias/bars, three traditional coffee-houses (cafeneio), three traditional goods shops, the central market, eighty thousands visitors per year and seventy-five thousand new employment positions.

After the annual competition of the European Union, the village was awarded the European Village Renewal Prize 2000. After an invitation by the Ministry of Culture, the Nymphaio Community represented Greece at the EuroMed “Exchange of experiences” Workshop which was held at Syracuse, Sicily, 1-3 October 2004, on the “Development of networked activities related to culture”.

4.3. Proposals

Taking into consideration the successful course of the Community affairs, the future form of development should be kept in accordance with the main objectives so far, namely its sustainable development, the absolute respect of nature and culture and the protection of its natural resources. Some indicative proposals based on this theoretical background, could be:

- a. the completion of infrastructure works, with emphasis put on those protecting the environment.
- b. The efficient management of natural resources.
- c. The adoption of a Special Plan for the Management and sustainable tourism development, through the elaboration of a programme which combines tourism development and environmental management with special emphasis on the following parameters :
 - The plan application under strict environmental conditions in order to preserve the biodiversity of the Vitsio region.
 - The implementation of a sustainable tourism development programme according to which the protection of the environment would be a determining factor, while the development of few mild activities is encouraged.
 - The development of the area based on its ideal existing capacity which will determine for all individual districts of the Vernon mountain, the preservation capacity of the number of people, its flora and fauna and of the occasional visitors, based on the sustainable production of its natural resources (water, soil, air, etc) and on its assimilating capacity in preserving its environmental models.
- a. the promotion of special and alternative forms of mild tourism development, revolving around two thematic axes :
 - natural life, environment, mountain space, education and recreation, developing a network of special and alternative forms of health, winter, trekking, education and convention tourism, and
 - civilization, religion, environment, nature-loving, observation and study of the flora and fauna, developing a network of special forms of mountaineering, religion, cultural, rural and eco – tourism.
- b. the instruction, education and professional training of the local population.
- c. Attracting investors (preferably local ones to reinforce entrepreneurship locale) for the creation of special facilities to support alternative forms of tourism (sports etc).
- d. The cultivation of extraversion and cooperation with geographically integrated settlements with a view to extend the visitors’ stay in the wider area.

5. Proposals and measures for the attainment of development goals in mountainous areas

The developmental course of Nymphaio as presented, manifested how a mountainous community can be enhanced, get over its isolation, retain and even increase its population, create new employment positions and prospects for its inhabitants and at the same time respect the natural, built and cultural environment by implementing an integrated programme of protection and enhancement actions.

Four development objectives and the measures for their implementation are set in the framework of an integrated development scenario :

- **Objective 1** – Protection of the natural environment and sustainable management of natural resources (actions pertaining to the protection and enhancement of protected areas, the preservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of agricultural land and forests as well as the reinforcement of mountainous and disadvantaged areas so as to preserve their agricultural activity. A basic element of the natural environment management should be the complete and accurate recording and charting of the natural reserves of mountainous areas in Greece for every mountain region, the development of the national cadastre, reforestations, the utilization of Natural Resources for the development of Mild Forms of Energy, works for liquid and solid waste management, reclamation/irrigation works, works for the management of agricultural water resources and recreation services.
- **Objective 2** - the lifting of the tendencies for isolation and land abandonment, and the enhancement of the residents' quality of life in the mountain areas. The improvement of basic environmental infrastructures (water supply and drainage, liquid and solid waste management works (biological wastewater treatment, sanitary landfills, irrigation works and works for the agricultural water resources management). Technical and building facilities for regional surgeries, health centres, open care centres for the elderly (KAPI), nurseries and kindergartens, sports facilities and primary and secondary education buildings. Improvement of access and communication capabilities between mountain areas and the rest of the country (construction and/or improvement of safe road networks, broadband network, and so on). Traditional settlements restoration Social Services Improvement : expansion of the “Help at Home” institution, adequate staffing of health centres with medical doctors of all specializations, the required modern equipment in health centres, intensive literacy projects, mandatory introduction of environmental courses in all educational grades- necessary for the raising of environmental awareness, emphasis – priority for new sports, e.g. mountain biking, horse riding, skiing, mountaineering and other winter sports. Professional training, familiarization with new technologies, creation of new employment positions, coping with the demographic problem, subsidy for permanent residency.
- **Objective 3** – Support of the agricultural economy. In a plan of integrated development for mountainous areas, a great emphasis should be given to the support of those processes which will allow the economy of mountain areas to produce to the maximum possible degree the goods which they need to consume, reducing thus their dependency upon markets of other regions. At the same time, agriculture should function as the basic lever for economic development. Towards this direction there should be: improvement of the businesses competitiveness (support and modernization of businesses, development of new forms of tourism, quality assurance and accreditation of the goods produced, promotion of local products). Reinforcement of the Primary Sector, complete reforestation, creation of organized livestock parks, reinforcement and modernization of agricultural and livestock enterprises. Subsidies and investment motives to production units of organic cultivations. Support of cottage industries and small scale industry. Creation of new and reinforcement of the already existing agricultural cooperatives, support and propagation of traditional professions.
- **Objective 4** – Reinforcement of alternative forms of tourism and enhancement of the mountain areas cultural heritage : alternative forms of tourism development (the synthesis of ecotourism, rural tourism, tours, educational and cultural activities), subsidy for the restoration of old guest houses and the construction of new ones, consultative support and commercial – administrative services to tourist related businesses, organization of convention tourism, ski resort tourism development, rafting tourism, mountaineering and

nature trekking tourism. Extension of the tourist season throughout the year, construction of the necessary infrastructure to support tourism (sign posting of routes, supplementation and development of the necessary infrastructure of settlements in tourist routes, modernization and expansion of accommodations), enhancement, development, promotion and propagation of the cultural heritage.

It is necessary of course to create in parallel with the aforementioned general and specific targets, the political, social, scientific and institutional prerequisites for a better utilization of the European, national and local development policies.

Above all though, it is considered necessary to design an overall and integrated (geographically and culturally), national “mountain policy”, which will lead to designing an overall strategy to deal with mountain space as an integrated entity. At the same time, it will lead to a decentralization of the mountain space administration, to institutionalizing an urgent “National Action Programme for mountain areas”, and to the designation of a minimum percentage of national land which will include areas of complete nature protection. It is also regarded as necessary to establish a national interdisciplinary body which will be in charge of the synthesis, control and assessment of sector policies for the mountain space.

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