

## *The Alps: a unique laboratory for sustainable development models*

Mountain areas, rich in specific resources and characterized by a unique environmental and cultural heritage, generally suffer from developmental delays, mainly due to the distance from large cities and from the main service centers and the general lack of development models based on their specificities. Moreover, the attempt to apply effective development formulas to urban areas in mountain areas has aggravated this situation, since in many sectors it has led local populations to move away from mountain-related activities and practices, in favor of those with low production of value/service and mainly supported by public financing. Therefore, the marginalization of mountain territories is largely the result of the adoption of a wrong strategy to promote its development, far from the specific features and territorial "vocation".

The development of innovative development models, consistent with the resources and peculiarities of mountain areas, combining development with environmental protection, is among the greatest challenges to deal with, especially because it is strictly related to the global urgency of identifying new sustainable development models.

The mountains, therefore, can be conceived, in the third millennium, as extraordinary laboratories in which these new models can be tested, not without the decisive contribution of **the public administration, in charge of the challenging task of "governing" and defining the management of such a vast and complex territory**. In fact, unbalanced models of governance leaning towards an excessive public presence risk triggering welfare processes that depress private initiative and reduce the perceived "ownership" of citizens towards these territories. Public administrations can seize the challenges of sustainability by giving voice to these territories, guaranteeing the competitiveness of the States in which they are located. Furthermore, the contribution of **the world of Research and Innovation will be crucial in triggering innovative territorial processes** that are indispensable for giving voice in these territories; of **the business world, capable of transforming resources into value** and forming "human capital" and of **the civil society, which benefits from the goods and services produced by the mountains**, taking up the challenge posed by sustainable development of the territory.

Within this framework, mountain areas should not be considered as a "problem", instead as an "opportunity", changing the paradigm and removing the "stigma" that has been hanging over these territories for too long. In this way, mountain territories will have the opportunity to become generators of wealth and value, capable of contributing significantly to the competitiveness of the Regions, States and the entire European Union. The Alpine Region has the mountains in its center, encompassing 48 Regions and 7 States, which can all promote this change so that, through specific integrated policies, the mountains can redeem themselves.

How to represent this new, possible, role and horizon for mountain areas so that territorial institutions, the research world, the business world and the civil society that operates directly on the territory considered realistic and attractive to invest on the sustainable development of these territories?

The consultation carried out by the workshop participants highlights how all four of the "worlds" investigated (research, business, public administration, civil society) converge on two aspects: the **social one** for the needs of peculiarities and historical and cultural roots of the mountain territories, and that of the **services**, where the desires of health have been selected by at least one representative per group. The **review and innovation of mountain legislation has been identified as a strategic action** by three out of 4 groups, as well as the **management and protection of natural resources**. The greatest similarities in the choice of actions / priorities are found between the world of research and public administration. The world of research has at least one of the priorities identified in common with the other three groups.

**The historical-cultural peculiarities and the natural and environmental resources are the pillars on which the sustainable development models for the mountains should be based.** The greeting is the priority service that must be guaranteed as well as the innovation and the revision of the guarantee that are considered indispensable for the future of the mountain territories. The world of research intercepts at least one of the priorities identified by the other sectors of society.