

# JOINT STRATEGY REPORT

Joint strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe with a special focus on participatory governance



# JOINT STRATEGY REPORT FOR COMMUNITY-LED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN MOUNTAIN AREAS

An analytical framework to assist community-based initiatives to upgrade cross-border participatory governance processes

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**Central Mountains**

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## FOREWARD

The Interreg Central Europe “*Central Mountains*”<sup>1</sup> project aims to overcome the challenge of establishing enduring and **sustainable collaboration across borders in mountainous regions in Central Europe**. The initiative tries to enhance governance structures and processes essential for fortifying regional development and cohesion beyond geographical complex boundaries. Foremost, “Central Mountains” is keen to capitalize on the opportunities afforded by the involvement of its partners in the European community, fostering collaboration across a spectrum of countries, regions, and territories mainly located in mountainous areas. The project holds the conviction that the represented commonalities surpass differences, enabling the transfer of experiences acquired in one territory to positively impact another. The idea stands out due to its innovative transnational approach, specifically embracing an **Alpine-Carpathian-Sudetes perspective**. Its distinctive contributions are concentrated on the improvement of governance structures, supporting existing transnational cooperation frameworks, and strengthening cooperation between the institutions and territories.

The current strategic report has evolved from the analysis of data collected during the initial phase of the project. Primary efforts involved the examination of more than 50 completed or ongoing projects related to CM similar topics, conducting in-presence discussions with young students from the affected areas who provided their insights on governance topics, and gathering perspectives from all project participants, encompassing both partners and stakeholders. The objective of carrying out these activities was to examine the progress made in European projects related to governance and sustainable development issues and, at the same time, **initiate direct conversations with the prospective key players** in these processes, namely, the youth, and those currently grappling with these dynamics daily, such as administrators and local communities.

The entire effort has revolved around a clearly defined context, specifically **mountainous regions primarily situated in cross-border areas**. The focus was on collecting the most pertinent concerns and expectations from local communities and project target groups, with the primary objective of assessing whether the existing governance processes are capable of adequately representing and supporting these interests. This work has been shared and officially presented during an online public meeting with all the key stakeholders involved in the project, representatives of the Carpathian and the Alpine Convention, and the Joint Secretariat of Interreg CE. In addition to the presentation of official results, specific questions were also raised during the meeting, aiming to confirm or challenge the main findings collected.

This work is to be considered an open box and will be implemented and improved throughout the project’s duration.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/central-mountains/>





## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

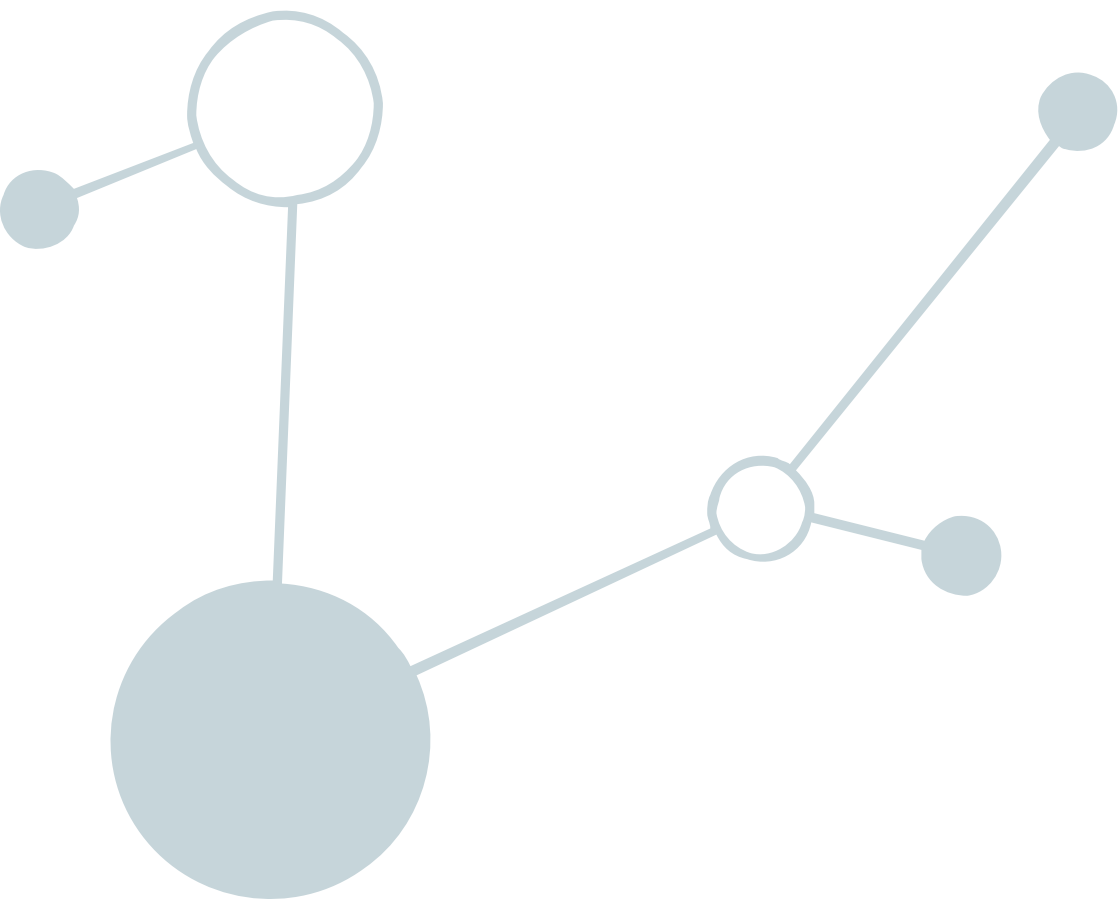
AC	Framework Convention on the Protection of the Alps (Salzburg, 1991), abbreviated as the “Alpine Convention”
ACE	Association of the Carpathian Euroregion (PL) - CM PP
AF	Application Form (of the Central Mountains project)
AP	EGTC Alpine Pearls ltd (AT) - CM PP
ARZ	Association of Regional Brands (CZ) - CM PP
Brasov	Brasov County (RO) - CM PP
CBF	Carpathian Biodiversity Framework
CBFA	Cross-Border Functional Area
CC	Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Kyiv, 2003), abbreviated as the “Carpathian Convention”
CE	Central Europe
CF	Carpathian Foundation-Hungary (HU) - CM PP
CIPRA	CIPRA International Lab (AT) - CM PP
CM	Central Mountains (project)
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EURAC	Eurac Research / European Academy Bozen/Bolzano - CM PP
FOK	Foundation of Landscape Protection (PL) - CM PP
ISIG	Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (IT) - CM PP
PP	Project Partner
Rzeszow	Rzeszów County (PL) - CM Lead Partner
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WP	work package
ZMOS	Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (SK) - CM PP





# TAXONOMY - CENTRAL MOUNTAINS GROUND

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# 1 Community-led initiatives and SDGs: a conceptual framework for a functional project relationship



After receiving official endorsement from the United Nations in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which consist of 17 interlinked goals (with corresponding 169 targets) spanning various environmental, economic, and social issues, have established themselves as the primary international framework for promoting sustainable advancement towards a prosperous society<sup>2</sup>.

**Community-led initiatives (CLIs)** have been acknowledged for their role in foreshadowing broader societal shifts toward sustainability itself. In some instances, their endeavours, spanning many years, anticipate and align with many of the objectives outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This alignment extends to the contextualization of specific goals and the overarching attempt of the 2030 Agenda to integrate a variety of environmental and social objectives seamlessly. Among these objectives, the priorities of CLIs seem to be strongly linked to some specific goals, such as SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG11 (sustainable communities), and SDG17 (partnership for the goals)<sup>3</sup>.

According to the Central Mountains (CM) working vision, the CLIs can propose innovative approaches for conceptualizing, comprehending, **structuring, and implementing actions** that are highly conducive to achieving significant advancements in sustainability issues, such as local development, civic or citizen participation, sustainable tourism promotion, mobility, and social inclusion. Such an approach can address the challenge of implementing sustainable development goals locally. Indeed, key local project communities often lack the **skills, resources, or opportunity** to build relationships with existing diverse networks and structures, leading to a tendency to sideline such work in favour of more “friendly” activities resulting in a propensity to prioritize actions that are more familiar and appealing to stakeholders, often leading to the abandon of such tasks.

<sup>2</sup> Esteves, A. M., Genus, A., Henfrey, T., Penha-Lopes, G., East, M., *Sustainable entrepreneurship and the sustainable development goals: Community-led initiatives, the social solidarity economy and commons ecologies*. Business Strategy and the Environment, 30(3), 1423-1435. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2706>, (2021).

<sup>3</sup> Akbulut, B., Demaria, F., Gerber, J., Martínez-Alier, J., “Who promotes sustainability? Five theses on the relationships between the degrowth and the environmental justice movements”, Ecological Economics, 165, 106418, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2019.1064>, (2019).



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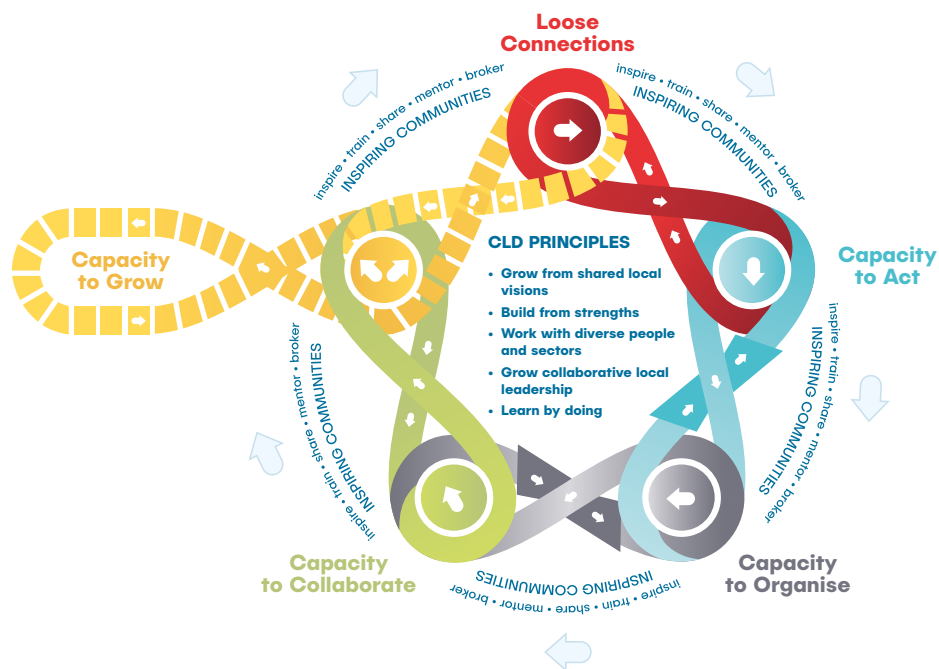


Figure 1  
[https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/ic\\_resource/how-does-sustainable-change-happen/](https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/ic_resource/how-does-sustainable-change-happen/)

On one hand, the approach of the SDGs has so far proven to be less transferable in concrete terms, confining itself to defining broad policy directions on a strictly general level. Most of the SDGs, are crafted at a highly aggregated level and are frequently assessed using national and transnational targets. These overarching goals and indicators may lack sensitivity to specific contextual priorities and can be ambiguous or less meaningful when assessing success at the local level. On the other hand, CLIs can emerge as much more impactful and practically achievable soft governance tools. Furthermore, their activities are rooted in the actual practice of sustainability, as lived and embodied, grounded in specific local and regional contexts and usually supported by appropriate social institutions and cultural perspectives<sup>4</sup>. From this perspective, CLIs should be seen as the operational translation of the macro guidelines set forth by the SDGs.

The project, however, must face an additional challenge: implementing these actions in mountainous contexts, such as those represented by the Alps, the Carpathians, and the Sudetes. Mountainous regions face diverse daily challenges and increasingly require dedicated governance models capable of building relationships and providing responses on a scale as local as possible. The main purpose and goal of this strategy are to inspire and, at the same time, encourage the communities living in the project’s mountainous areas to take a leading role in decision-making processes that impact critical choices for sustainable and tangibly meaningful development.

With that being said, according to Central Mountains’ vision, community-led sustainable development is an approach that underscores the crucial involvement of local communities in the planning, decision-making, and execution of initiatives geared towards attaining enduring sustainability. This approach acknowledges that communities are frequently the most adept at comprehending their distinct needs, obstacles, and prospects. Moreover, mountain communities are well-suited to pinpoint solutions that harmonize with their cultural, social, economic, and environmental settings.

<sup>4</sup> Becker, S. L., Franke, F., Gläsel, A., “Regime pressures and organizational forms of community-based sustainability initiatives”, Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions, 29, 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2017.10.004>, (2018).



## 2 Sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe

In a general effort to continuously integrate sustainability considerations into a growing range of themes and topics, a project-linked definition may help to better understand and address the results achieved so far. As a project consortium, we need to start taking responsibility for social development, for the health of mountain areas' economy and for protecting their vital environments.

Within the framework of the Central Mountains project, sustainable development is to be understood as the development of a sustainable mountain environment in the Alps, the Sudetes, and the Carpathians, which includes both the protection of natural resources and local economic development. The project aims to achieve it through cross-border cooperation solutions, and the activation and development of sustainable processes, especially through direct citizens' involvement and active youth participation in decision-making processes. The second part of the Sixth Assessment Report, titled "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability<sup>5</sup>," was released in 2022 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Notably, it features a comprehensive Cross-Chapter Paper specifically focused on mountains. This latest report emphasizes the intricate connections among the climate system, ecosystems, and human communities, underscoring the imperative for increased efforts in adapting to climate change. This urgency is particularly pronounced in mountainous regions, where the impacts of climate change manifest more rapidly. The sustainable development of the mountain areas in CE is not exempt from these considerations and the project's activities entail adopting a comprehensive and well-balanced strategy for advancing economic, social, and environmental aspects. Mountain areas, frequently exhibit different sensitivity and encounter distinctive challenges. Addressing these challenges necessitates meticulous decisions to safeguard the welfare of both the environment and the communities residing in these areas. The project's Action Plans will be directly aimed at capitalizing on the results obtained during the initial project activities and also on the stakeholder inputs and suggestions, embodied in the present strategy under review.

Central Mountains, in detail, will try to address the meaning of sustainability towards tourism management issues. According to the CM perspective, sustainable tourism management is an approach that aims to optimize the positive influences of tourism while minimizing its adverse effects on the environment, society, and economy. Therefore, the objective of sustainable tourism should be to guarantee that tourism activities promote the enduring welfare of the project's mountain areas and its communities, all the while safeguarding the capacity of future (young) generations to fulfil their requirements and expectations. Multi-level sustainable tourism development in mountain areas refers to an approach that considers and integrates sustainability principles across various levels of influence, recognizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of different stakeholders in the mountain tourism industry.

At this project stage, the primary emphasis is on ensuring the comprehensive sustainability of the tourist project destinations, in the Alps, the Carpathians and the Sudetes. This includes the adoption of strategic action plans aimed at reducing the environmental footprint of tourism, fostering the preservation of cultural

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-ii/>



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heritage, and safeguarding the welfare of local mountain communities. The multi-level approach acknowledges that sustainable tourism is an intricate system with diverse actors and influences<sup>6</sup>. It underscores the importance of collaboration, shared responsibility, and a comprehensive comprehension of sustainability at various levels, spanning individual behaviours to the broader contexts of destinations and industries. This approach aims to establish a tourism model that is more resilient and balanced, providing benefits not only for the present but also for future generations. Sustainable destination management encompasses the planning and development processes that strike a balance between meeting the needs of visitors and safeguarding the natural and cultural richness of the destination. Local communities will play a crucial role in such activities. Engaging and empowering them in the decision-making processes, ensuring they benefit economically, and preserving their cultural heritage are essential project aspects. Community-based tourism initiatives that involve and benefit local inhabitants will contribute to the long-term sustainability of sustainable tourism development of mountain areas.

### 3 Governance: the time to take responsibility by both institutions and communities

Governance is a key factor for sustainable mountain development and, according to the aims of this project, is closely linked to the cohesion beyond border countries of mountain regions of the Alps, the Sudetes and the Carpathians. Governance should be understood as “the act of governing,” a political decision-making process where actors organize themselves through relationship structures, shaping a set of principles, rules, etc. to implement processes (*European Commission. 2001. “European Governance - A white paper”. Brussels, p. 35.*<sup>7</sup>). **Governance should be adaptive and integrative, to cope with the complexity of transformative changes in mountain areas** as well as the need to reach marginalized areas and their main demands. Governance should be capable of endorsing successful cooperation networks facilitating the collaboration and learning between all sectors, all stakeholder levels and mountain project working areas. Such a model should encompass the institutions, both formal and informal, that play a role in guiding and regulating the use of mountainous landscapes and communities, as well as addressing the challenges and opportunities unique to such specific areas.

The project aims to **increase the quality of governance processes in specific mountain areas by enhancing the capacity of decision-makers and policymakers to involve local communities**, youth, and high-profile organizations as present and future leaders in CE mountain areas. CM is structured in several activities to be realized within a three-year time frame (2023-2026). Its final objective is to raise awareness and to spread knowledge about the adoption of innovative methods (such as youth engagement) and instruments (such as the platforms) of active participation in decision-making processes among political actors, private organizations, established networks, and young generations.

<sup>6</sup> Ciasullo, M.V., Troisi, O., Grimaldi, M. et al., “Multi-level governance for sustainable innovation in smart communities: an ecosystems approach”, *Int. Entrep. Manag.*, J 16, 1167-1195 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-020-00641-6>, (2020).

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/DOC\\_01\\_10](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/DOC_01_10)





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### 3.1 *Sharing experiences to learn from each other: the role of communities and municipalities as change agents*

Another crucial aspect of this strategic document is to **encourage a productive exchange of experiences among the diverse mountain environments** implicated.

In the Alpine region, there is already a significant degree of international cooperation, driven by its transboundary nature that involves eight countries and 48 regions within the EUSALP perimeter. The region is marked by a complex political and administrative landscape. While governance mechanisms operate on an alpine-wide level (e.g., Alpine Convention<sup>8</sup> (AC), EUSALP<sup>9</sup>, Interreg Alpine Space), there are also bilateral arrangements between states (such as the Agglomeration programs in Switzerland/Liechtenstein and Interreg programs). The governance of the Alpine region encompasses a multi-level system, with interactions between national, regional, and local authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), fostering collaboration at both the international scale, such as the EU level and various other levels. The Carpathian region seems to be less structured in terms of active cooperation instruments, but recently great strides have been made, especially thanks to the work done by the Carpathian Convention (CC), capable through its Protocols<sup>10</sup> to let Carpathian countries work together on shared issues. Despite the absence of a program funding area specifically designated for this field, or, to be more precise, the lack of a dedicated macro-regional strategy, all of these developments are still unfolding.

Collaboration between communities, insisting in mountain areas, across borders should be frequently motivated by **the acknowledgement that challenges and opportunities extend beyond political boundaries**. Through joint efforts, cross-border municipalities can forge a more cohesive and sustainable future for their respective regions. For this reason, according to the CM approach, sharing positive experiences (“best practices”) and potential synergies is crucial. **Municipalities** both broadly in the Carpathian and Alpine regions, play a crucial role as catalysts for change due to their proximity to local communities and direct influence on various aspects of community life. The decentralized structure of municipal governance grants them agility and responsiveness, making them effective agents for positive change at the grassroots level. Their initiatives can have direct and immediate impacts on residents’ lives, emphasizing their instrumental role in shaping the future of communities. For example, in the Alps (NUTS3 classification<sup>11</sup>) there are about 6200 municipalities, many of which are in border regions.

Key factors for **municipalities as change agents** are:

- **Proximity to Local Communities:** municipalities, being in close geographical proximity to the communities they serve, have an in-depth understanding of local needs, challenges, and expectations. This proximity positions them effectively to initiate and spearhead change efforts that directly address these issues.
- **Responsive to Local Needs:** local governments are more agile and responsive compared to higher levels of government. They can quickly adapt to changing circumstances, address emerging issues, and implement policies that reflect the specific needs of their residents.
- **Community Engagement:** municipalities can actively engage and involve the community in decision-making processes through a participatory approach. This involvement cultivates a sense of ownership among residents, ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of the community are integral to the change process. Crucially, the effectiveness of participatory processes relies

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.alpconv.org/en/home/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.alpine-region.eu/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/convention/protocols/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background>



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on their genuine implementation, with results genuinely reflecting the needs of the communities. Superficial actions should be avoided at all costs, as they can significantly erode trust in democratic processes.

- **Innovative Solutions:** local governments often have the flexibility to experiment with innovative solutions and pilot actions/projects. They can test new ideas on a smaller scale before considering broader implementation, promoting a culture of innovation and experimentation.

According to CM vision, municipalities can actively engage and involve mountain communities in decision-making processes through a participatory approach. This involvement might cultivate a sense of ownership among residents, ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of the community are integral to the change actions. **Participatory processes must be earnestly implemented**, and the results genuinely reflect the needs of the communities. Superficial actions should be avoided at all costs, as they can significantly undermine trust in democratic processes.

## 4 Cross- border cooperartion

Cooperation is intended as collaboration and coordination between neighbouring countries of the mountain regions of the Alps, the Sudetes and the Carpathians and conceived as an **opportunity to rethink integration and development aspects at border regions**. Creating lasting partnerships, enhancing existing networks and providing a transnational framework for cooperation and multisectoral policy integration are the objectives of the cross-border cooperation driven by the project, through strategies and instruments for cooperation between citizens, young people, and structures governing the territories. In this regard, a fundamental action (according to this strategic document) will be the **promotion of territorial integration by exploiting opportunities within border mountain regions embraced by the project**.

This joint strategy is grounded in the conviction that adopting innovative forms of governance holds significant promise for achieving more sustainable and legitimate decision-making processes. The CM project highlights key attributes of participatory engagement processes, emphasizing their adaptability and flexibility across various institutional contexts and needs. The project outputs aim to offer a valuable overview of the mountain diversity framework and practical tools for the activation of mechanisms for the benefit of local and regional policymakers and decision-makers. In this regard, the success of the project should rely on the efforts and interactions between regions or entities that share a **common border**. The work on the **cross-border functional areas** goes in this direction. This type of cooperation involves coordination and partnership across borders to address shared challenges, promote mutual interests, and enhance overall development. **Cross-border cooperation occurs between neighbouring countries, regions, or local authorities** that are geographically adjacent as reported by the project grounded description (as well described in the project AF).

## 5 Stakeholders' involvement and engagement

Local communities and authorities, youth, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including civil society organizations (CSOs), small and medium enterprises (SMEs), Local Action Groups (LAGs), and others are considered the main stakeholders of the



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project. These will benefit from governance instruments strengthening their role and capacities in sustainable development and cooperation beyond borders. **The role of stakeholders is of central functionality to the construction of a solid and active cooperation network** involving local communities and other actors, and it must be strengthened to implement cross-border governance and transnational development strategies. Stakeholder involvement in the context of the project includes cooperation across borders through mutual learning and exchange of knowledge and best practices, as well as joint planning and common actions in line with their own specific needs and capacities. **They need more effective coordination in the process of multilevel governance**, connecting, collaborating, and empowering each other across Central Mountains to realise common challenges and jointly find solutions.

**In general, involving stakeholders means incorporating them into decision-making processes, activities, or discussions related to a project or organization.** This inclusion can manifest in various ways, such as seeking their input, feedback, or contributions to pivotal decisions. The essence of involvement lies in making stakeholders an integral part of the process and acknowledging their perspectives and expertise. On the other hand, engagement surpasses mere involvement and underscores the establishment of relationships, the promotion of communication, and the creation of a shared sense of acting purpose. Within the Central Mountains project, **engaging stakeholders requires maintaining continuous, open lines of communication, addressing their concerns, and providing opportunities for them to actively participate and contribute to the objectives and outcomes of the project or organization.**

Both involvement and engagement play a focal role in the success of the project and the work provided by its organizations. **Actively involving stakeholders ensures that their viewpoints are considered, leading to improved decision-making, heightened support, and a more sustainable and successful result.** Effective communication and collaboration with stakeholders also serve to bolster trust, transparency, and overall positive relationships between the organization and its stakeholders.

## 6 Central Mountains Youth Engagement: reinforcing capacities to work with youth

Most of the young students directly involved in CM activities feel they do not have enough space to express themselves in institutional debates nor can voice their concerns and ideas on burning issues.

Involving young individuals in decisions that impact them is not merely a question of entitlement, it embodies a fundamental principle of transparency. As generators of knowledge, they consistently demonstrate their indispensability to instigating social and environmental (from the CM perspective) change. Given the important challenges confronting both the Carpathian and Alpine mountains and communities, their involvement is imperative now more than ever. There are several degrees of youth engagement: youth can be consulted, contributing, partners, or leaders in our initiatives. **At this stage, CM consulted a minor representative sample of them, to better understand their level of knowledge on participatory governance issues.**

Young people can be involved in various capacities, including participating in decision-making, undergoing education and training, contributing to knowledge creation, promoting awareness and mobilization, establishing networks and partnerships, delivering services, and formulating solutions to address societal challenges. For the sake of the quality of the CM's activities, it will be beneficial to engage youth in all phases of the project cycle. Involving youth in design,



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implementation and evaluation actions can lead to more effective and appropriate planning by improving impact, and sustainability. Through meaningful engagement, youth are empowered to play a vital role in the mountain areas' development as well as in that of their communities. **Involving young people is not a one-time occurrence. Rather, it is an ongoing process.** Fostering youth participation demands a sustained dedication that typically begins with the readiness of politicians and administrators to embrace such commitment. It evolves through recurring procedures that provide opportunities for young individuals and ultimately establishes a concrete foundation and a standard for future processes, spanning various levels.

To get in touch with and mobilize young students, CM met them where they were, both in the Alpine and the Carpathian contexts, from September to November 2023. The results of the meetings have contributed to providing important assessments of the participatory governance project' structure.

### 6.1 Youth work and participation: key to change

In general, it is crucial to differentiate between the terms “youth work” and “youth participation,” as outlined in the Interreg Alpine Space Project Gaya<sup>12</sup> (Governance and Youth in the Alps). **Youth work** predominantly involves youth organizations and entities for young people (such as youth centres, faith-based organizations, street-based initiatives, etc.). Its primary objective is to foster the inclusion of young people and promote social cohesion by enabling the development of independent and engaged citizens, often through non-formal education. The environments it creates typically aim to be conflict-free, providing a platform for the active participation of young people within these organizations.

**Youth participation**, outside of youth organizations involves the active engagement of young individuals with public entities, including municipalities, regions, countries, and international treaties. The main objective of youth participation is to influence the development of new policies and public initiatives, aligning them with the needs and perspectives of young people. **The incorporation of youth input is seen as a means to make local communities more inclusive, sustainable, and attractive to the younger generation.** As with any political engagement, youth participation acknowledges the presence of conflicts and endeavours to address them through reasoned discussions and debate.

In the practical context of working with youth, the distinction between the two terms is not always clear-cut, as numerous synergies can be leveraged. Moreover, young individuals can be active participants in both youth work and external youth participation. Youth work is conducted by established organizations with diverse focuses, such as mountain sports (e.g., Alpine Clubs), outdoor/survival activities (e.g., scouts), faith communities (e.g., Catholic youth organizations), political parties, schools, and universities (e.g., student councils). Since many of these organizations are also partially politically engaged, young members may either align with the political positions of the overarching organization or, more commonly, develop political strategies that reflect their needs. These strategies are then presented to the overarching organization and the wider public. Given that these groups of individuals are already active and involved in various organizations, they can be seamlessly integrated into youth participation strategies and initiatives. This inclusion is pertinent to the objectives of the Central Mountains project. **Youth participation is crucial in any context, be it community development, policy-making, or other domains, as it plays a vital role in promoting inclusivity, diversity of perspectives, and the creation of sustainable outcomes.**

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/gaya/>



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Various non-institutionalized forms of youth participation already exist, including consultations, workshops, and youth events, which can contribute to advancing youth involvement. However, these approaches carry the risk of remaining isolated, lacking sustained political commitment, and insufficient follow-up and control of subsequent political actions, potentially leading to unequal opportunities for all young people over time. Institutionalizing youth participation is both a valuable solution and a necessary progression. The details of how this can be achieved will be outlined in the “*Alpine-Carpathian Toolbox for active involvement of citizens and youth in decision-making processes*” which will be developed in the final stages of the project. Drawing insights from the examples mentioned earlier and tailoring governance mechanisms to facilitate and manage cooperation, it is evident that **institutionalizing the process of youth engagement is crucial**. This involves embedding youth participation within the existing governance system, with a focus on understanding the expectations of the system and its participants. A well-defined design of the cooperation process and the establishment of partnerships during the initial stages are vital to preventing conflicts and disappointments later in the process.

### 6.2 Striving for a Meaningful Youth Engagement

To establish a shared understanding and institutional culture that promotes the active involvement of young individuals in relevant engagement mechanisms and programs, CM has conducted four collaborative **workshops with young students to explore the design of youth participation initiatives in the Alpine-Carpathian-Sudetes Mountain regions**. The workshops designed for youth aimed to actively engage them in decision-making processes and empower them to contribute significantly to their communities. These sessions served as crucial platforms for interaction and knowledge-sharing, seeking to explore the current and potential relationships between the youth in mountainous areas and local governance mechanisms. The evaluation will extend to understanding the dynamics between young people and existing or planned transboundary governance structures. During the workshops, participants will also assess and gauge their awareness, knowledge, and participation levels regarding the current instruments and governing bodies in their territories. Additionally, the sessions aim to facilitate a co-creative process to develop new tools for active youth involvement in the future.

The workshop activities were meticulously tailored to cater to the diverse youth demographics they aimed to engage. To achieve this, a combination of activities suitable for all target groups and those specifically tailored to demographics was developed. The overall workshop framework revolves around two primary phases. The initial phase involves **the administration of a universal exploratory questionnaire** (1) shared among all participant groups. The subsequent crucial phase (2) is dedicated to **participatory activities with the youth**. This second step is further divided into two distinct activities, one designed for high school students and another tailored for university students. While maintaining a consistent structure for the workshops overall, the decision was made to allow for slight variations in methodology and content to better align with the unique characteristics of each target group in their respective areas.

### 6.3 Don't forget to play. “Questions are never indiscreet, answers sometimes are”<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, “indiscreet” answers are precisely what we aimed to gather with the questionnaire activity addressed to the youth. Almost 100 students were interviewed, divided into 4 different areas: the Jagiellonian University, Department of Geography

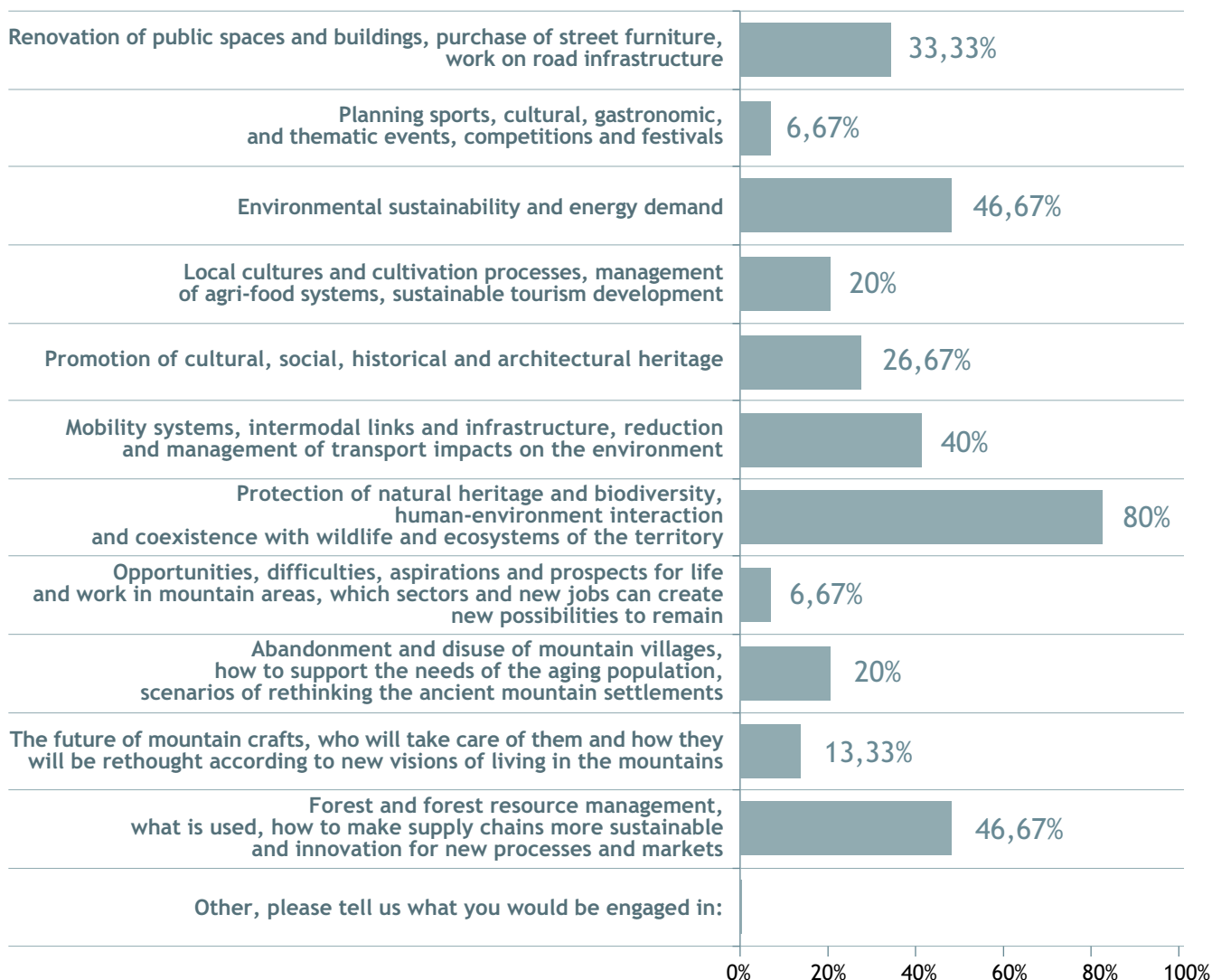
<sup>13</sup> Oscar Wilde, “*An Ideal Husband*”.



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and Geology, of Cracow (PL); 4 different high schools in Rzeszów (PL); the Bundesgymnasium in Dornbirn (AT), and another high school in Feltre (IT). Employing questionnaires proves advantageous in prompting personal and individual reflection on the governance concept within the framework of one’s existing knowledge. Furthermore, these surveys seek to elicit perspectives from young individuals concerning their awareness of territorial challenges and their inclination to actively contribute to transformative processes. From a project standpoint, the questionnaires function as a valuable instrument for information gathering, facilitating a more profound comprehension and connection between the Alpine and Carpathian regions. The concern for environmental issues becomes evident in the subsequent collected data, especially when participants were asked about the specific aspects and themes in which they would prefer to actively participate in decision-making processes. The responses draft a clear picture of heightened awareness and a willingness to potentially engage in matters of broad environmental significance. This places these issues among those that young people perceive as requiring urgent commitment and action.

To the question **“What themes and aspects of your local environment would you prefer to have a more active role in decision-making?”** students provided the following responses:

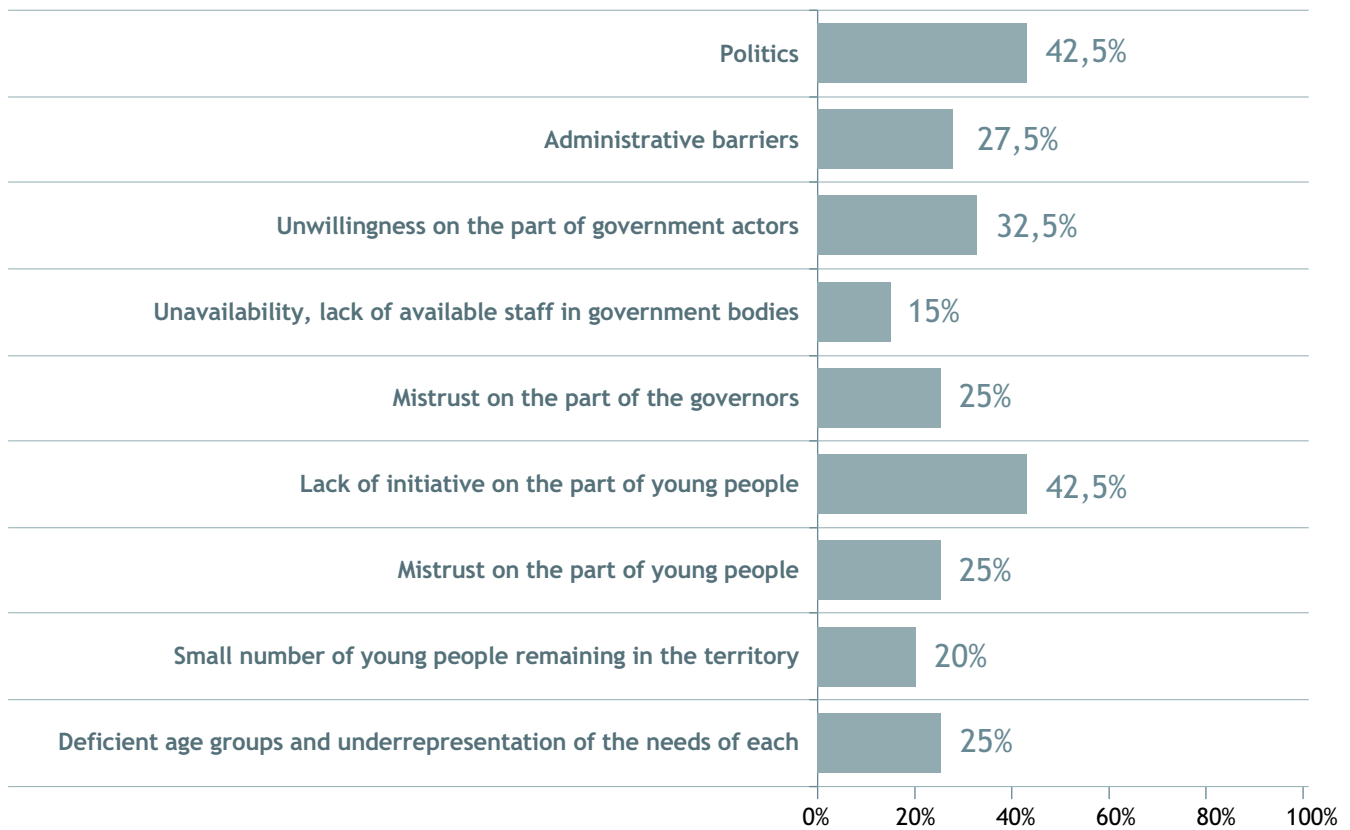




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Young individuals also highlighted the significance of enhancing communication between themselves and the government. They strive to inspire both individuals and the youth to take an interest in their localities, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging corresponding actions. The government is urged to play a dual role—educating through public debates, meetings, and activities, while also placing more trust in the younger generation and communities as a whole.

To the question *“What, in your view, are the main barriers preventing increased youth participation in decision-making within local government bodies?”* students from the Carpathians provided the following responses:

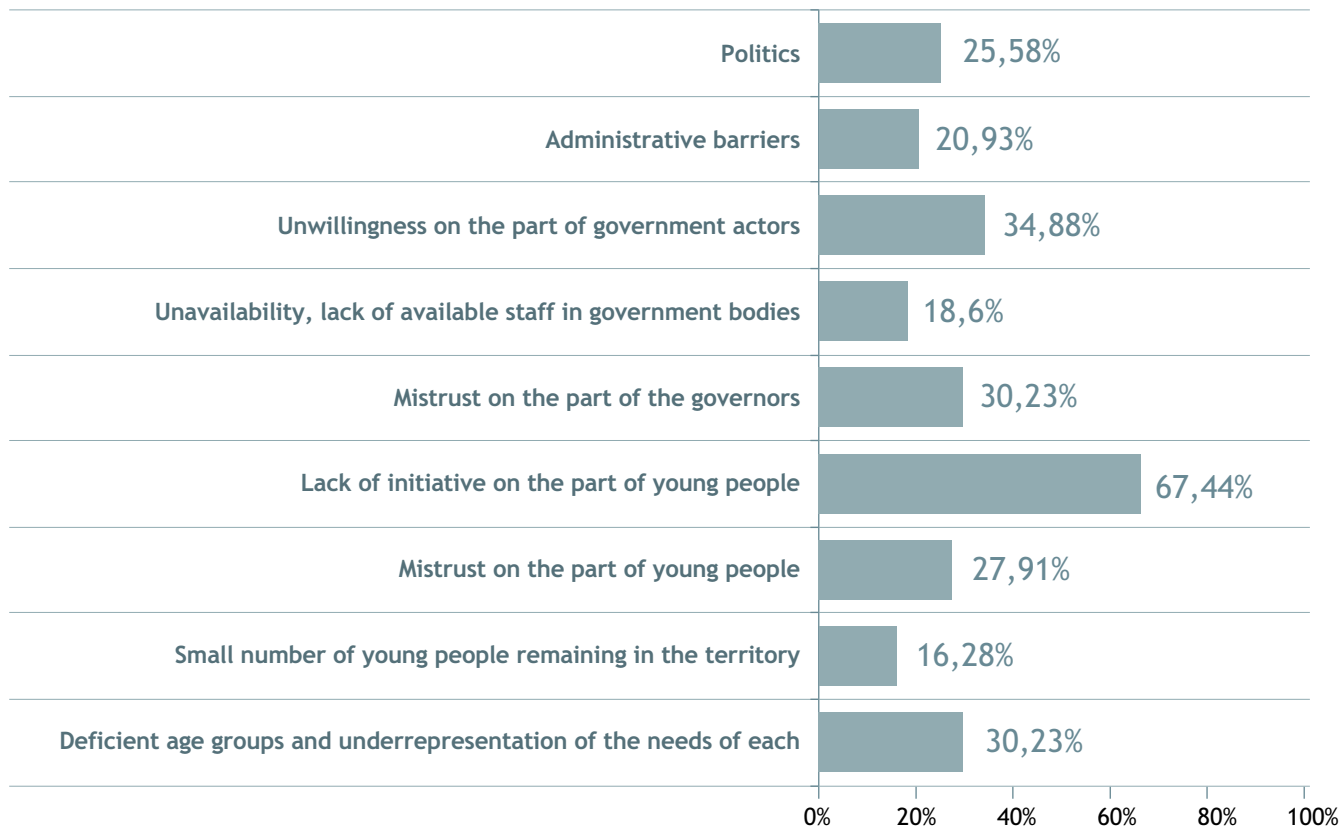


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While the Alpine peers gave the following answers:



Students participating in the project activity are cognizant of occasional limitations in their initiative. They recognize the corresponding responsibilities of governing bodies, which, in turn, may face challenges in establishing closer connections due to limited availability and opportunities. What is certain is that the interviewed youth express key factors aimed at enhancing opportunities for interaction and involvement in future decision-making processes. The gathering of “programmatic” points for the development of participatory governance models has been facilitated not only through closed responses to the questionnaire but also by the open spaces provided for suggestions and ideas, as perceived from the perspective of young individuals.

The involvement of youth in the Central Mountains project is seen as crucial for establishing a durable collaboration founded on a participatory, multi-level, and multi-sectoral approach. Within this context, young individuals play a vital role as facilitators of innovative cross-border governance models. They are instrumental in guaranteeing the lasting success of co-design processes for strategic cooperation across the Alps-Carpathians mountains.







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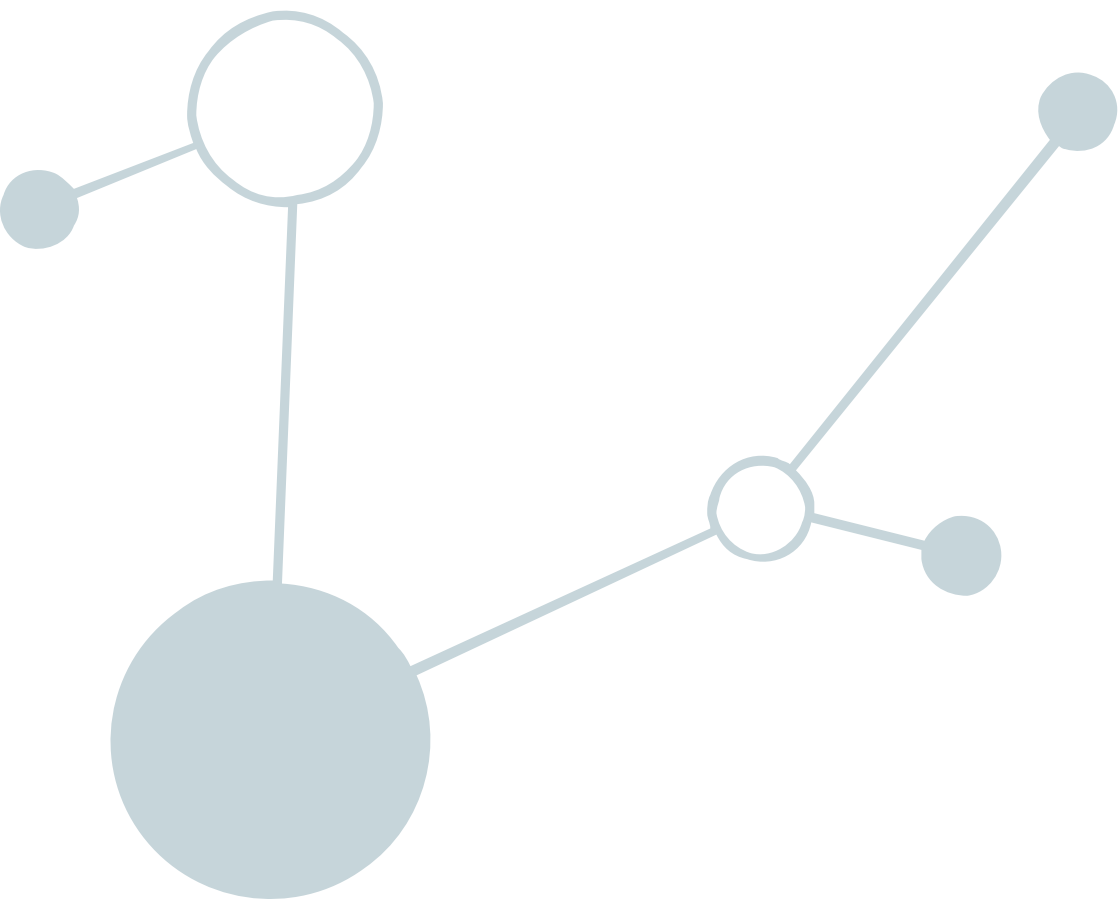
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# B

## LESSONS LEARNED: A RESULTS' CAPITALIZATION FOR THE PREMISE OF BETTER COOPERATION GOVERNANCE IN CE MOUNTAIN AREAS

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## Central Mountains

In this section, the report intends to **provide strategic leads to improve transnational CE participatory governance with a dedicated focus on mountain areas**. This work aims to gather the design outcomes collected so far and project them into the future for their concrete implementation. These remarks have arisen from the analysis of completed EU projects on related themes, the organization of workshops with young students, and the direct contribution of project partners divided into mountain-linked working groups (WGs). The contents will then be shared with the main project stakeholders, with the aim of collecting valuable feedback and being able to rely on their support in the implementation of pilot actions.

To better address the results, an important step in the project's communication process is the identification of **stakeholders, people who are affected by the CM activities or interested in participation**. Most often they are part of communities living inside the project's working areas (Alps, Carpathians and Sudetes) or in its vicinity, local community/municipality authorities, the landowners, farmers, entrepreneurs in tourism and other services, governmental and non-governmental organizations, young students and local opinion leaders. A very important CM "target group" is represented also by the **Carpathian and the Alpine Conventions**, influential entities that can contribute to concretely endorsing future achievements and presenting the activities' goals from a broader institutional perspective.

Stakeholders can be engaged in the process voluntarily, but a much better way is their systematic information and involvement. There are several methods of good communication, the choice depends on the type of audience. The approach will focus on the main target group and not on public opinion and will primarily consider the viewpoint of the recipients, their motivations and their relationship with the issue, rather than convincing them.

Furthermore, this strategic document aims at improving and **enabling the transfer of knowledge between the Alps and the Carpathians** also pushing for a better **definition/creation of potential Cross Border Functional Areas (CBFAs)** sharing integrated and spatial and socio-economic features.

## 7 What does the recent EU projects' history say about the health status of governance mechanisms and sustainable development in CM working areas?

### 7.1 Setting the analysis

Various innovative approaches have been employed by local initiatives to address sustainability issues. To chart a path forward for local sustainability efforts, it is essential to glean insights from these previous experiences, understanding both their challenges and opportunities. We synthesized the extensive portfolio of projects in this area in the following overviews of key scientific, research and policy initiatives for localizing sustainability issues in mountain areas. The overview of previous projects and policy initiatives can help identify gaps and opportunities for local sustainability.

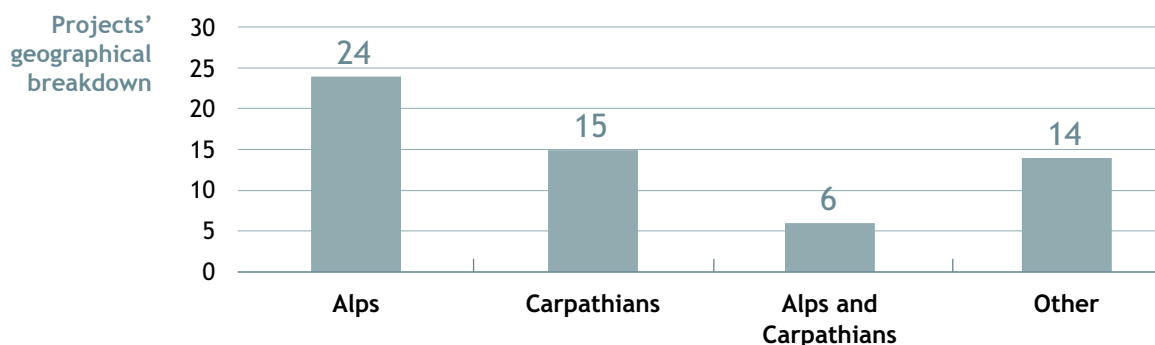
Central Mountains collected **59 projects to evaluate the governance solutions proposed** and experimented with in previous projects and assess the extent to



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which they contribute to sustainable development and may be replicated in different mountain contexts. Timewise, have been considered projects funded under the 2014-2020 programming period in order to be able to explore their activities and outputs. However, the work also analysed some projects of the older or newer programming period, if relevant. Although local sustainability has been widely acknowledged in past projects, the overview shows that this topic has not been adopted equally across all of them. This underscores the necessity for a systematic approach to consistently integrate and put into practice local sustainability across all SDGs. Institutions, policies, and strategic partnerships play a crucial role in shaping this approach, emphasizing the significance of transdisciplinary efforts. These efforts should be capable of embracing diverse views and perspectives, fostering connections among various stakeholder groups (both academic and non-academic) through effective partnerships.

The projects primarily cover the geographical regions of the **Alps and the Carpathians**. The majority of the analysed projects pertain to the Alps (24 out of 59), exclusively involving Alpine countries. Others concentrate solely on Carpathian countries (15 out of 59). In a few projects, partners or beneficiaries extend across both Alpine and Carpathian countries (6 out of 59). Lastly, a minority of projects also include countries beyond the Alpine or Carpathian areas (14 out of 59). Nevertheless, these projects remain significant due to the proposed governance mechanisms or their involvement in at least one Alpine or Carpathian country.



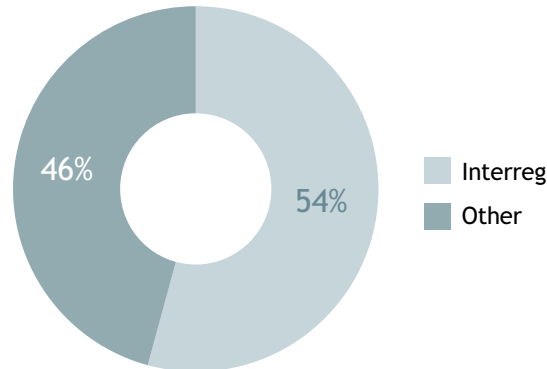
The addressed subjects encompass **sustainable development, with a specific emphasis on sustainable tourism, sustainable mobility, and environmental protection, particularly in mountainous regions**. Governance and participation processes are also part of the topics covered. The analysis incorporates projects that, while not exclusively centered on mountain areas, offer cooperation and participation mechanisms with relevance to the Alps and the Carpathians. This pertinence may arise either from the sector in which these mechanisms are applied (e.g. nature protection, and others) or from the goals pursued by the projects.

The funding sources are diverse, with a predominant focus on EU Programs such as LIFE, Horizon 2020, ESPON 2020, and the European Climate Initiative. Most of the scrutinized projects received funding through Interreg Programs, including Central Europe, Alpine Space, ADRION, and bilateral Interreg collaborations like Italy - Slovenia, Czech Republic - Poland, and others. A comprehensive investigation was conducted within the Interreg Alpine Space and Central Europe programs, while limitations in language and accessibility hindered a similar in-depth examination of Interreg cross-border cooperation programs. Nonetheless, certain bilateral Interreg projects are included in the Database and were analyzed for this report based on their relevance as indicated by project partners. The collaborative efforts of all project partners played a pivotal role in bringing forth diverse experiences. Further funding sources will be considered during the next project's activities.



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Funding Programmes  
distribution



7.2 Relevant assumptions from the projects’ analysis

The examination of past and ongoing projects in the realm of sustainable development, particularly in mountainous regions, reveals key trends in the implementation of cross-border governance. Within the analyzed projects, governance is strengthened through five primary sets of mechanisms:

- a) **Establishment of New Transboundary Institutions:** this often involves the creation of institutions spanning borders, frequently accompanied by national counterparts (e.g., Carpathian Civil Society Platform, see D.1.4.4).
- b) **Utilization of Existing Frameworks/Institutions:** This includes enhancing the capacity of members within existing working groups or identifying common interests to reinforce governance (e.g., AlpGov and GoApply).
- c) **Experimentation of Local-Level Coordination and Citizens’ Involvement:** Some projects explore specific coordination at the local level and effective engagement of citizens (e.g., FoodSHIFT 2030).
- d) **Creation of Cross-Border Mechanisms Combining Coordination and Participation:** This involves establishing transnational networks comprising specific stakeholders and experts (e.g., Centralparks, LifeStockProtect).  
 ▲ *This category is predominant, possibly because experts and stakeholders with shared interests are more easily connected than other subject categories or public authorities.*
- e) **Projects Focusing Exclusively on Fostering Citizen Participation:** This includes limited projects concentrating solely on enhancing citizen participation (e.g., GaYa), often through awareness-raising efforts.

While category “e” projects provide only two specific examples, it is noteworthy that participation becomes more prominent in new projects added to the Database. This may be due to the fact that it is often challenging to directly involve citizens without being able to guarantee them a long-term benefit. This is a characteristic of many European projects that struggle to ensure the long-term capitalization of results.

Various concepts of cooperation mechanisms, participation, and sustainable development become evident (as discussed in Section A). Participatory governance mechanisms are seldom conceived as a bottom-up decision-making process. More commonly, it takes the form of information dissemination, awareness-raising, or the engagement of experts. The direct involvement of citizens is more frequent in projects that are not transboundary but rather localized, as indicated by the Database.



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The term sustainable development used interchangeably with sustainability, is also diverse, encompassing different ideas of local development (such as tourism and rural areas), a strong emphasis on sustainable mobility, a sustainable mountain environment that includes natural and cultural heritage, nature conservation, as well as climate risk prevention and adaptation.

Several common challenges have also come to light:

1. One of these regards the aforementioned **shortage in projects that promote participation, understood as the engagement of citizens and civil society in decision-making processes and community-led sustainable development**. This gap may stem from the fact that participatory processes typically necessitate lengthy preparation and execution phases that may not align with the average project duration (2-3 years). Frequently, the requests are to be in condition to perceive especially a direct economic impact from the activities and project outcomes. This is not simple and often does not depend solely on project resources.
2. Second, despite projects typically being conducted in English, **language barriers may arise, particularly in the Carpathian area, where stakeholder involvement is crucial**. This is especially true when engaging more vulnerable and isolated communities, requiring additional investment in interpretation services to ensure a more inclusive public engagement in projects. **The conflict in Ukraine has been identified as a significant barrier to meaningful cooperation in the Carpathians**. On the flip side, the conflict in the adjacent areas has bolstered Carpathian solidarity. Numerous local communities, authorities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been actively aiding refugees, offering shelter, food, educational facilities for children, and ongoing assistance from the onset of the conflict. Additionally, they have extended their support to Ukrainian communities in the border regions of Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. This stands as an exemplary instance of cross-border cooperation.
3. **A notable limitation of the cooperation schemes established in the analyzed projects is that they often tend to be suspended after the project concludes**. This applies to newly formed networks as well as stakeholder and professional networks created to support existing cooperation, encompassing virtually all the examples described in this report, except for the governance in the EUSALP where strong political support is often ensured.
4. The active **involvement of young people is present in a few projects**<sup>14</sup> and often not well-structured in activities specifically directed towards them. Their participation and empowerment are crucial for shaping a mountain future that offers them concrete opportunities for life and work, and thus motivates them to remain in mountain regions.
5. Lastly, the meaning and **representation of Cross Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) seem to be not yet widely diffused** and too little debated. This is well explained by the fact that the concept has recently been adopted by the European Commission<sup>15</sup>, and there is still much work to be done for a proper definition and functionality. Cross-border functional areas (CBFAs) have the potential to serve as an instrument for further reducing cross-border barriers and enhancing the flow of people, goods, materials, and knowledge. However, some aspects of this concept remain rather vague or diverse<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/gaya/>

<sup>15</sup> CEMAT, *Functional Areas in Member States of the Council of Europe*. Preparatory Study for the 17th Session of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning (CEMAT). Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale, Administrației Publice și Fondurilor Europene, Bucharest, (2017).

<sup>16</sup> Jakubowski, A., Trykacz, K., Studzieniecki, T. and Skibiński, J., *Identifying cross-border functional areas: conceptual background and empirical findings from Polish borderlands*, *European Planning Studies*, 30:12, 2433-2455, DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2021.1958760, (2022).



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### 7.3 Central Mountains calls for action

It is crucial to promptly tackle the significant above-highlighted limitations in project work to **enhance the sustainability of these projects** and, ultimately, **make a genuine contribution to cross-border cooperation**. To achieve this, funding authorities and public administrations should **improve planning for the continuity of funding and capitalization of previous project outcomes**. While this report does not aim to provide easy solutions, involving stakeholders, local communities, and existing networks **during the project drafting phase** could be a promising starting point. This approach may help identify cooperation needs that extend beyond individual projects and can be strengthened through local ownership. **Effective community-driven initiatives** in geographically targeted project areas, aiming to significantly influence social and economic outcomes, **necessitate a robust shared vision and a readiness to collaborate across various sectors**.

Furthermore, as emphasized in the Central Mountains activities, and aligned with recent EUSALP developments<sup>17</sup>, **increasing investment in young people and involving them actively** in the drafting and development of projects could lead to innovative proposals that address contemporary challenges such as sustainable mobility, energy, and environmental issues, **aligning with the expectations of the youth for the future**.

A promising strategy for achieving sustainability **involves a bottom-up transformative change driven by local communities**, cities, and networks. This approach is customized to suit the specific conditions of each individual **context that in the case of the Central Mountains project are morphologically similar but institutionally different**. Local communities are often not a uniform and cohesive social entity. They comprise diverse stakeholder groups with varying and sometimes conflicting social, economic, and environmental priorities. These differences exist both within local regions and in the interactions between local and national profiles.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.alpine-region.eu/>

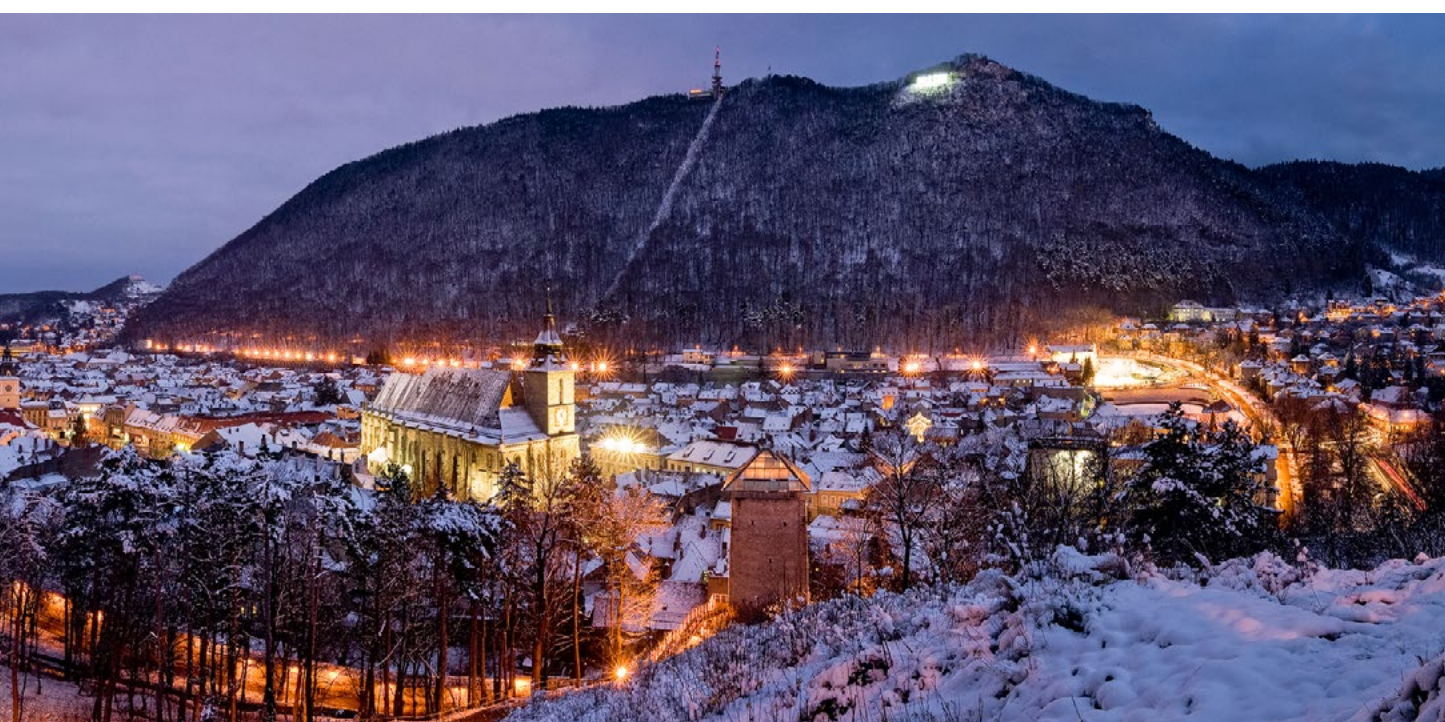


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According to the data collection from previous Alpine and Carpathian projects, the main figures so far achieved, call for the following strategic actions:

- *Moving away from centralized decision-making approaches in promoting initiatives addressed to project-linked communities and stakeholders.*
  - It is crucial to embrace multi-stakeholder collaboration and cross-scale cooperation in decision-making processes. This shift should involve participatory planning methods, including tools like community needs analysis, community visioning, and round table discussions with the involvement of high-profile project promoters such as the Carpathian and the Alpine Conventions.
- *Localizing sustainability patterns through the settlement of short-term goals first, and long-term goals then.*
  - Most of the projects (especially EU ones) are limited in time and resources. Without the prospect of making significant investments, it is difficult to ensure the capitalisation of long-term results. The effectiveness of long-term actions and the achievement of community-laid goals are likely to be disrupted under potential instabilities (e.g., political volatility and change in resources). Defining goals and actions within a specific local context can involve divergent priorities, often necessitating negotiation based on power dynamics among stakeholders. To address this, CM actors should join a deliberative learning process alongside community-led dynamics. This involves reflecting on current goals and actions and collaboratively framing new ones through genuine bottom-up stakeholder engagement<sup>18</sup>. This joint framing of context-specific goals and actions facilitates coordinated efforts that are both mindful of environmental constraints and socially desirable while being actionable within local communities.

<sup>18</sup> Schneider, F., Klày, A., Zimmermann, A.B., Buser, T., Ingalls, M., and Messerli, P., *How can science support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? Four tasks to tackle the normative dimension of sustainability*, *Sustain. Sci.* 14, 1593-1604, (2019).





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- *Embedding participatory governance approaches in bottom-up decision-making processes.*
  - As described above, participation is rarely intended as a bottom-up decision-making process, but more often as information/awareness-raising or merely as the involvement of experts. Downscaled regional and local guideline strategic project goals will be essential for creating capacity building, partnerships, and learning at the local community level. Effectively implementing global frameworks at the local level and empowering local actors poses considerable challenges in practice due to numerous knowledge gaps and practical obstacles emphasised by institutional fragmentation. This is especially evident in mountain areas.

## 8 The Central Mountains stakeholders galaxy: fueling the partnership for a broader cooperative participatory governance model in CE mountain areas

### 8.1 Partnership social responsibility through stakeholder engagement

Confronted with undeniable global challenges, such as poverty, biodiversity loss, and climate change, that surpass national boundaries and impact a significant population adversely, especially in mountain areas, organizations spanning various sectors have tried to gear up, aiming not only to generate economic value but also to **create social value**.

The management of stakeholder groups or individuals who can affect or are affected by the achievement of the project's objectives is a crucial element of this strategy. The absence or insufficient engagement of stakeholders throughout the project life cycle, especially in the initial planning and implementation stages, often harms the expected project performance. The dual consequences of inadequate contextual knowledge from stakeholders and a lack of their support in the field highlight the crucial significance of effective stakeholder engagement. However, **integrating this engagement faces challenges, such as limitations on project resources and conflicting interests among stakeholders.**

The methodological approach of this strategy recognizes the crucial importance of **effectively engaging stakeholders** throughout the entire project development, a characteristic inherent in any endeavour aiming to foster synergies meeting predefined quality standards. In this context, the extensive literature<sup>19</sup> on the definition of "stakeholders" serves as the foundation for identifying the actors the project should involve. To enhance current connections, expand the dialogue to previously overlooked subjects, and attain a **more comprehensive engagement that fosters the development of new and meaningful relationships**, emphasis and attention will be placed on three specific variables to determine their level of consideration: responsibility, influence, and proximity.

<sup>19</sup> Bacq, S., Aguilera, R.V., "Stakeholder Governance for Responsible Innovation: A Theory of Value Creation, Appropriation, and Distribution", *Journal of Management Studies*, Wiley Blackwell, vol. 59(1), pages 29-60, (2022).



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The “responsibility” of the project pertains to specific stakeholders who initially experience the project’s impacts. The “influence”, whether formal or informal, emanates from those capable of shaping or guiding certain strategic decisions within the project structure. Our goal is to inform and “consciously influence” a broad spectrum of stakeholders, enabling the project consortium to be positively impacted by the external environment. This provides those with the right to be heard an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. “Proximity” indicates the closeness of actors to the project environment, serving to gauge the “efforts” involved in their direct involvement phase and to strengthen established trust relationships. The levels of influence and proximity should be assessed based on the knowledge and experiential background of each project partner with each actor.

The strategy aims to provide different values across different contexts because its results are dependent on a combination of institutional and community-led initiatives. According to this taxonomy, Central Mountains has listed **more than 80 relevant stakeholders** so far.

The identities and classifications of the recognized SHs have been organized into typological categories. This categorization aims to establish a framework illustrating their diversity and to depict the roles associated with each based on their structural characteristics, functionality, and potential impact on relevant territories and topics. Upon analysing this classification, a clear numerical prevalence of certain typologies becomes apparent, with a notable concentration in specific Partners’ networks, as reported by the following chart:

Taxonomy	SHs
Business support organisation	17
General public	
Higher education and research organisation	1
Local Public Institution	
Media	
Municipality	2
National Public Institution	3
National-Regional Park	4
NGOs	19
Protected Area	
Regional Public Institution	13
SMEs	2
Student Association	2
Tourism Board	8
University	1
Other	12

The identification of stakeholders also considered another parameter, namely the assessment of their potential impact on the project’s goals and the practical realization of its objectives. Stakeholders were evaluated on a scale of three levels-low, medium, and high-reflecting their capacity to influence and contribute to the project’s outcomes.



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Level of impact	SHs
Low	5
Medium	39
High	38

This represents an **ongoing process** and will last till the end of the project. Stakeholder engagement should be taken as a core element of community-led sustainable development and the connected action plans. In the context of sustainable development, successful stakeholder engagement involves skillful management of relationships among stakeholders, **considering both short-term and long-term stability**. This practice is crucial for striking a balance among environmental, economic, and social conditions in the project’s objectives. Such a process, by dialogue-oriented approaches, will aim to resolve potential conflicts and enhance the feasibility of achieving the sustainability goals of both action plans and pilot actions.

### 8.2 Central Mountains engages in action

At this stage, it becomes essential to analyse and categorize the primary expectations of each project stakeholder. This is necessary to understand if there are conflicting interests among them and to what extent these conflicts can be mitigated and consequently overcome. The Central Mountains project requires a systematic approach that can support the development of an effective stakeholder engagement plan, taking into consideration both the management of stakeholders and management for stakeholders having potential conflicts addressed at various stages rather than as sudden shocks that could overwhelm the project. In multi-stakeholder processes that embrace participatory approaches, stakeholders play a structured role in shaping decision-making dynamics. The evolution of



## Central Mountains



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participatory governance involves **stakeholders influencing the development of substantive content, particularly in framing thematic issues, conducting policy analysis and design, and generating and applying knowledge.**

Therefore, **keeping stakeholders informed** will be crucial to safely achieve project objectives. Establishing positive stakeholder relationships is essential for long-term project value creation. This enables the partners to actively listen to and engage with relevant stakeholders while disseminating values and principles to safeguard all the sustainability dimensions (especially economic, social, and environmental). Effective engagement with communities and stakeholders has the potential to enhance project performance and can be a decisive factor in determining the success or failure of certain project activities. This engagement serves as a valuable tool for navigating and responding to the intricate social, economic, cultural, and political environments in which pilot actions take place.

To become more widely accepted, such engagement will have to **establish a more coherent and convincing endorsement by relevant bodies** (such as the Carpathian and Alpine Convention for example) and their specific contributions to the performance of the project implementation phase. Earning legitimacy necessitates the active involvement of stakeholders, whereas **sustaining legitimacy requires formal mechanisms that strike a balance between the representativeness and competencies/authority of the leadership**<sup>20</sup>. This is especially important in mountain areas (such as the Alps, the Carpathians, and the Sudetes) where connecting with local knowledge and the environment often requires bottom-up approaches. Strategically, it is known that, up to now, an active network capable of involving both the Carpathians and the Alps for a discussion on increasingly shared and common issues does not exist (except for some past partnerships<sup>21</sup>). It is the right time to promote and support similar initiatives.

<sup>20</sup> Leardini, C., Moggi, S., Rossi, G., “*The New Era of Stakeholder Engagement: Gaining, Maintaining, and Repairing Legitimacy in Non-profit Organizations*”, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 42:6, 520-532, DOI: 10.1080/01900692.2018.1491593, (2019).

<sup>21</sup> <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/Alps-Carpathians-corridor.aspx>



## Central Mountains

Given the above, Central Mountains engage in the following actions:

- *Empowering and promoting a dedicated mechanism for the active engagement of local stakeholders in the most relevant decision-making processes (establishing national committees involving all relevant target groups):*
  - The need to involve stakeholders in the most relevant decision-making mechanisms is increasingly vital. Their concerns should, at the very least, always be heard and, when valid and significant, taken into account. In the area where CM is focusing, stakeholders typically include those from research, the public sector, and select tourism industry representatives. Unfortunately, **civil society is frequently overlooked** in the formulation and execution of national strategies addressed to local communities. Active involvement of stakeholders and participatory governance is crucial in the development, planning, and implementation of CM pilot actions, as illustrated in this strategy.
- *Advocating existing dedicated platforms and encouraging the creation of new ones for cooperation and thematic exchange among relevant target project groups (e.g., relying on the European Youth Parliament<sup>22</sup>, summer schools, and workshops):*
  - The primary requirement for establishing a platform (especially digital ones) is to design a mechanism facilitating effective collaboration among stakeholders, grounded in the exchange of information (knowledge, experience, problems). This exchange results in the generation of value. Simultaneously, the central interaction among stakeholders shapes an internal structure comprising participants, values, and filters, and involves participants in the innovation process in their effective interaction. Platforms such as the existing Carpathian Civil Society<sup>23</sup> and the under-construction Carpathian Sustainable Tourism, both part of significant project activities, can ensure effective communication of participants through the exchange of information, ensure the coincidence of the interests of participants as a factor in the success of the platforms and propose the formation of an innovative culture of cross-border cooperation. It is time to take concrete steps to involve new actors in the Alpine and Carpathian Convention activities.
- *Sustaining the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions, the EUSALP, and the EUSDR<sup>24</sup> institutional context as the official framework to address and implement the obligations under other practices or agreements:*
  - Referring to authoritative and institutionally recognized figures is crucial. Building trust among stakeholders relies on the backing of institutions and key figures actively engaged in topics related to the CM's main activities, particularly daily. This also enables referencing a well-defined decision-making framework and, when needed, suggesting enhancements, changes, or integrations. The two conventions are pivotal treaties aimed at enhancing cross-border cooperation. There is a strong need to prevent and counteract further fragmentation of the regulatory and decision-making structure to move towards a more pronounced institutional harmonization in the Carpathians, the Alps, and the Sudetes.

<sup>22</sup> <https://eyp.org/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/en/tartalom/carpathian-civil-society-platform>

<sup>24</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/danube\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/danube_en)

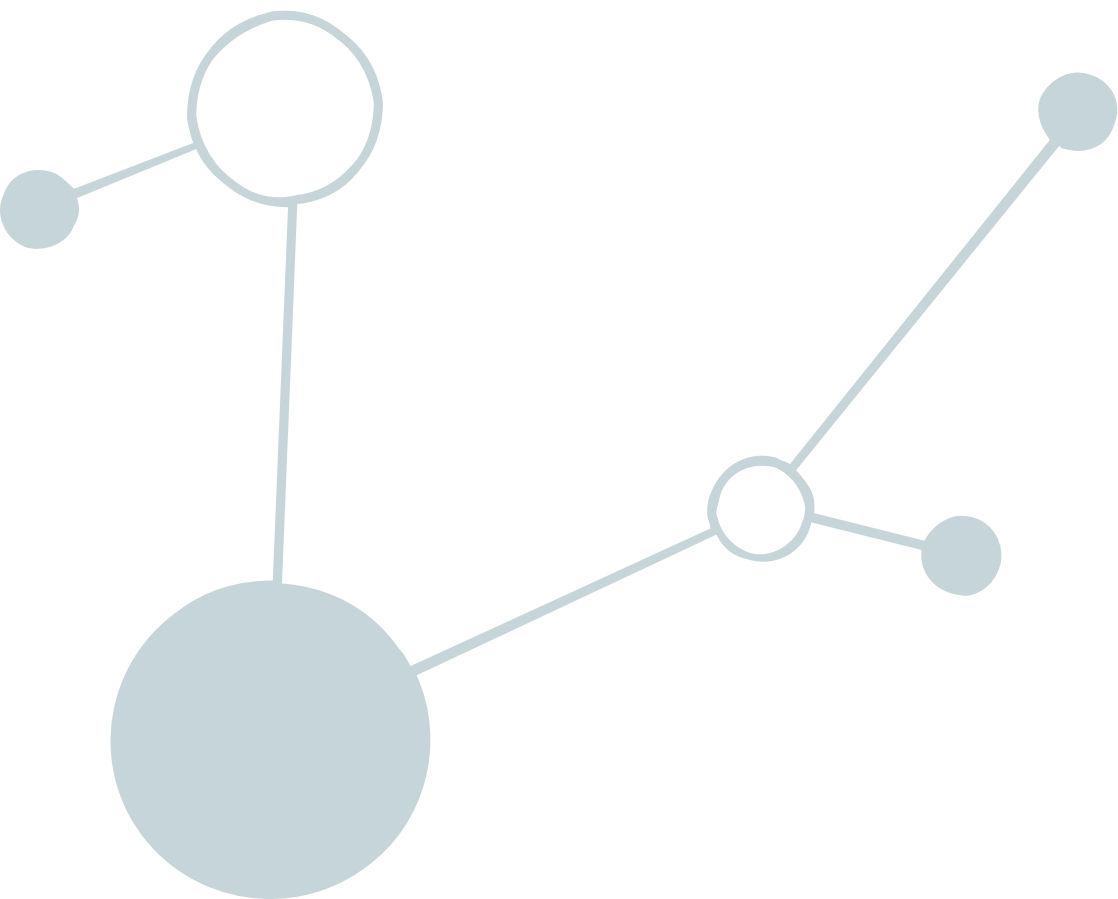






# THE CENTRAL MOUNTAINS OUTLOOK ON THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY-LED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN AREAS

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## 9 A co-design collective approach for better understanding the pathways through which future environmental and socioeconomic changes might influence mountain areas in CE

### 9.1 Methodology

In order to gather and analyze information for the collaborative development of the strategy for mountain regions, a working module has been distributed among the partners of the Central Mountains Project. Such a working layer encompasses various elements essential to the process of formulating an inclusive strategy report to have a look at the future. The collaborative design of strategic actions plays a crucial role in advancing well-informed adaptation to the ongoing and anticipated impacts of multilevel governance. **Information supporting the political decision-making process**, on both a National and Regional scale, **must be practical, easily understandable, communicable, credible, and rooted in the needs and experiences of its users**. The collected inputs yielded important insights into the needs of communities touched by Central Mountains.

While these aspects exhibit interconnectedness in various ways, the initial aggregation of results has been performed based on the geographical project areas of the respondents:

- **The Alpine area**
- **The Carpathian area**
- **The Sudeten area**

The gathered information has subsequently been structured according to the macro-area of reference, encompassing context, goals, and processes. The consolidation of questions has been executed in the following manner:

#### ➔ THE CONTEXT

- ***Territorial challenges:***
  - According to your opinion, what are the most important lessons the Alps can learn from the Carpathians<sup>25</sup> and vice versa? Please indicate at least 1 lesson per mountain area.
- ***The Functional Areas:***
  - According to your knowledge, please indicate where the potential “Cross-border Functional Areas” (CBFA) to be considered relevant for the Central Mountains project (not delineated by administrative borders) can be established. Indicate at least 1 possible CBFA.
- ***The Working groups:***
  - Please connect each detected CBFA to 1 of the two identified project WGs (D.1.1.2).

<sup>25</sup> The question was posed with this formulation also to the Sudeten partners. In any case, during the re-elaboration of the results, as the collected responses referred to the specificities of the area of origin of the partners themselves, they were taken into account as referring to the Sudeten area.



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- **Interaction with existing governance structure:**
  - What is your level of knowledge of the following governance structures? Rate the level chosen among Low/Medium/High.
- **Key actors and local stakeholders:**
  - Regarding the above-mentioned structures, which are the most important actors that should be involved within these structures? Please list 2 actors per structure related to your mountain area (Alps/Carpathians).
- **Youth involvement:**
  - Do you know any youth network/association/action that should be contacted and informed about our project? If yes, please indicate the affiliation and explain how you know it.

### ➔ THE GOALS

- **Steps of the participatory process:**
  - If you were to connect community-led sustainable development of mountain areas to SDGs, which would take priority? Please list no more than 7 SDGs and try to explain why.

### ➔ THE PROCESS

- **Risks:**
  - According to your opinion, what could be the main risks in implementing the strategy in the project's areas)? Please indicate at least 3 main risks.
- **Key resources:**
  - What should be the main resources (funds, qualified people, etc.) to overcome barriers/risks/lack of trust to consider within the strategy? Please indicate at least 3 resources.
- **Success:**
  - What factors can contribute to the success of the strategy? Please indicate at least 2 factors.
- **Set a collaborative framework:**
  - Please describe the possible advantages and positive impacts of a participatory and inclusive governance model in your mountain area (3 sentences).
  - What can motivate your local communities to play an active role in local governance processes? Please indicate at least 3 triggering factors.
- **Channels:**
  - Communication modalities and tools. Indicate which communication tool you better use most frequently to communicate with your stakeholders.

At the end of this section, statements have been crafted to summarize the essential insights obtained from the Central Mountains consortium.



## 9.2 The Alpine Outlook

The partners involved in the Alpine area recognize important lessons to be learned from the Carpathian area.

These lessons encompass effective wilderness management, especially in **dealing with the coexistence of large carnivores**. Additionally, they acknowledge the **significance of understanding the substantial political differentiation at local, regional, and national levels in the Carpathian region**, which is partially shaped by the diverse stages of integration into the European Union among the countries. Successfully addressing and navigating this complexity represents a valuable insight that the Alpine region can leverage.

Conversely, the Carpathian area stands to gain insights from the Alpine region's experiences, particularly in:

- The robust **development of the tourism industry**, which, in some instances, has led to a “monoculture” of the territory, resulting in notable environmental and social impacts.
- The governance landscape in the Alpine area showcases well-established institutions like the Alpine Convention, along with developed practices of cross-border inter-municipal cooperation. Additionally, a **variety of governance structures, ranging from the transnational to the interregional level, provide valuable lessons for the Carpathian region**.

Regarding Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs), the HEurOpen Region<sup>26</sup>, situated along the Italy-Austria border, is proposed as highly relevant to the project's objectives. There is potential for its expansion to include the Slovenian territory, with the flexibility to integrate other areas as well.

Knowledge levels about the Alpine Pearls EGCT<sup>27</sup> are reported to range from medium to high. In contrast, knowledge related to the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSPT) and the Carpathian Civil Society Platform (CSSP) is noted to be low. Results concerning Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFA) knowledge exhibit a spectrum from low to high.

In conclusion, the Alpine partners highlighted the following categories of key actors and local stakeholders as pertinent to involvement in the strategy's implementation:

- Touristic destination managers
- Public transport providers
- Education institutions
- Energy providers
- Upper administrative institutions
- Representatives from other EGCT/Local Action Groups bodies

<sup>26</sup> <https://heuroopen.eu/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.alpine-pearls.com/en>



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9.2.1 THE ALPINE GOALS

The table below illustrates the insights gathered regarding the prioritized SDGs considered crucial for the mountain community-led sustainable development strategy:

SDG Principle	Deemed relevant by:	Comments
11 - Sustainable cities and communities	3/3	<p>Small-scale Alpine structures provide an ideal framework for promoting inclusion, safety, resilience and sustainability.</p> <p>Sustainability might be understood as both a process and outcome feature, meaning that governance systems should be themselves sustainable to produce higher sustainability as an outcome.</p> <p>Citizens' involvement is needed for the design of sustainable cities/communities because if the design is not needs-/user-oriented they will not use it accordingly.</p>
12 - Responsible consumption and production	3/3	<p>Smaller communities like those in mountain areas often have better chances to shift to more sustainable models of circular economy.</p> <p>Alpine communities can give fundamental inputs to develop strategies focusing on sustainable production patterns and consumption, which can also aim at increasing awareness of visitors about these topics.</p> <p>It is relevant to inform and involve local businesses and communities in the development of new methods, creating understanding and willingness to change behaviour/<i>modus operandi</i>.</p>
13 - Climate action	3/3	<p>Even though climate change is a global issue, mountain areas face it in a particular way, for instance by experiencing relevant impacts on the winter tourism economy.</p> <p>Development strategies based on the needs of local alpine communities can lead to innovative and efficient solutions to combat climate change in all relevant fields of action (Energy, Forests, Green Economy, Natural Hazards, Soil Conservation, Spatial Planning, Tourism, Transport, Water Management) (See also Principle 15).</p> <p>To achieve behavioural change, close involvement of citizens is needed.</p> <p>Awareness raising, communication and participation are key.</p>



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SDG Principle	Deemed relevant by:	Comments
7 - Affordable and clean energy	2/3	Mountain areas have often the chance to be energetically autonomous by exploiting distributed sources of renewable energy (e.g. energy communities). Participatory decision-making is needed for green energy production in the mountains (hydropower, but also other energy sources).
8 - Decent work and economic growth	2/3	Mountain areas face the challenge of diversifying their economy, also by innovating in traditional sectors (e.g. primary sector, handcrafting etc.). Bottom-up strategies aimed at sustainable economic growth and ensuring quality employment for all are essential to make life in these territories attractive and cope with depopulation trends.
3 - Good health and well-being	1/3	For tourists, the Alps are a symbol of a healthy lifestyle and well-being. It is essential that the inhabitants put this issue at the centre of any development strategy, to maintain and enhance this peculiarity, for the well-being of those who go on holiday in the Alps and those who live there.
4 - Quality education	1/3	Raising awareness of the importance of quality education is a key factor in guaranteeing job opportunities for mountain dwellers in the medium-long term (See also Principle 8).
10 - Reduced inequalities	1/3	Mountain areas are usually peripheral and suffer from spatial segregation and political, economic, social, and cultural “distance” from centres.
15 - Life on land	1/3	To create a sustainable way of living in the mountain regions everyone (communities, businesses, education) needs to be involved.
17 - Partnerships for the goals	1/3	Partnership is key for supporting the „need of exchange“ of local communities with similar or different realities, by enabling them to create fruitful relationships, working together for sustainable development.



## 9.2.2 THE ALPINE PROCESS: RISKS, RESOURCES AND CHALLENGES

The potential **risks** foreseen by the Alpine project members while implementing the strategy can be classified into four primary groups:

1. **Strategic risks:** such as an emphasised top-down approach and lack of transferability.
2. **Obstacles to participate, difficulties in developing the participatory process and/or emerging conflicts:** such as the lack of interest/capability to participate in the process shown by local population/stakeholders, but also conflicting interests among actors on the use of resources and parochialism between Municipalities or other public institutions.
3. **Obstacles to the operability of foreseen solutions:** i.e., the risk that the strategy remains as a “piece of paper” without implementation. This can be due also to compliance issues, meaning that a single strategy for a wide and heterogeneous region, composed of areas with different rules and regulations, might pose problems of legal and practical applicability.
4. **External risks:** such as political uncertainties, climate crisis, and natural disasters, but also the possible mismatched timespan of foreseen transformation with the acceleration of global trends, which might also change from when the strategy is drafted to the implementation phase.

The primary **resources** recognized as crucial for addressing barriers, mitigating risks, and fostering trust within the strategy can be categorized into five areas:

1. **Promotion and improvement** of infrastructures and processes that are relevant for the entire area.
2. **Human resources:** such as facilitators to foster the participation of relevant/interested stakeholders, adequate personnel - trained also through capacity building activities - to draft the strategy and ensure its implementation.
3. **Incentives to participation:** for instance, rewards, formal recognition, networking etc.
4. **Acknowledgment** of responsibilities by stakeholders needed for the implementation and application of new structures and services.
5. **Economic resources:** such as access to structural development funds, or other financing strands to secure the new structures and processes beyond the project lifespan.

The **elements** that Alpine project partners believe can contribute to the success of the strategy can be grouped into four categories:

1. Capability to **combine different levels of intervention** (economic, environmental, social, cultural) by advancing a holistic approach to the matter.
2. Capability to **guarantee the ownership of the process** by local communities (sustainability in the long run) through a strong involvement of relevant actors and end-users in all the project phases, leading to the implementation.
3. Capability to **translate the strategy into concrete/practical actions**. Overly abstract documents such as certain protocols or conventions are not understood by citizens (but also by some stakeholders themselves), which also leads to a strategy not being taken seriously by critics.
4. Capability to **make transformations long-lasting**, by guaranteeing the commitment of project partners and stakeholders, successful communication



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to disseminate the strategy, and also the capability to attract external funds beyond the end of the project.

When asked to list the potential **advantages and positive impacts** of adopting a participatory and inclusive governance model in the Alpine area, project partners identified the following:

- Stronger and broader **awareness** by decision-makers and inhabitants of **sustainability issues** and the role of local communities to promote change by taking more informed decisions and actions.
- Stronger and broader **awareness** by decision-makers of **local resources availability**, as well as expectations and needs of local communities and actors (residents, workers in the region, specific age groups etc.) leading to better shaped, more user-friendly, and more legitimated policies.
- **Improved credibility** of authorities and community engagement models, leading also to positive economic impacts.
- **Easier access to financing strands** (e.g., EU funds and projects).
- **Better collaboration** with neighbouring countries.
- **Enhanced resilience** of territorial systems vis-à-vis global trends (demography, climate change, touristic flows etc.).

According to the Alpine partners, the motivation of local communities to actively participate in the local governance process can arise from:

- **Attachment** to the local context.
- Perceived **direct interest** to cooperate (for instance, economically) as well as perceived **usefulness** of participation (by demonstrating that ideas and dreams can be turned into reality).
- **Easy access** and safe spaces and opportunities to share their hopes and aspirations.
- **Incentives** to participation (material and intangible rewards, formal recognition, networking etc.), i.e., give people the feeling that their opinion and contribution are important for the result.
- **Good information** and communication about the possibilities to participate.

### 9.3 The Carpathian Outlook

In the Carpathian area, project partners highlight key learning aspects from the Alpine region, encompassing the (1) effective operation of direct democracy within local participatory processes, coupled with the development management process; (2) the non-hierarchical institutional and organizational richness covering crucial fields, fostering genuine partnership and cooperation among stakeholders; (3) Proficient management of territorial brands, along with tourism development strategies focusing on cultural and natural heritage. Furthermore, achieving a successful equilibrium between economic development and environmental conservation through strategic planning and a sustainable, long-term approach has been suggested as an important outcome to better understanding the process through which the Alps attained macroregional status within the EU.

Conversely, the Alpine area can learn from the experience of the Carpathian area in terms of:

- The **historical and cultural legacy of the territory and the communities** living in it.
- The importance of **integrating traditional ecological knowledge and local communities in nature preservation initiatives**, fostering a more holistic and sustainable approach to conservation.

As for the CBFAs to be identified for the project, several interesting hypotheses were reported, along different borders:





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- **Poland/Slovakia border:**
  - Tatra Mountains region. This area spans both countries and is characterized by a shared ecosystem, cultural heritage, and tourism opportunities, making it a suitable candidate for collaborative and integrated cross-border initiatives within the framework of the Central Mountains project.
  - Beskid Niski region.
  - Prešov area (Presov and Podkarpackie region).
- **Poland/Ukraine border:**
  - Brama Przemyska region.
- **Poland/Slovakia/Ukraine border:**
  - Kremenaros area.
  - Spiš region.

The understanding of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSPT) and the Carpathian Civil Society Platform (CSSP) appears to vary significantly among the project members, with a generally higher average knowledge level for the CSPT. Knowledge regarding the Alpine Pearls EGCT is reported to range from low to medium. The comprehension of Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFA) shows diverse results, spanning from low to medium levels, but the need to clarify the concept is evident, and it is necessary to find a definition that is clear and understandable for all project stakeholders.

Finally, the following categories of key actors and local stakeholders were mentioned by the PPs as relevant to be involved in the implementation of the strategy:

- Destination Management Organisations (DMOs)
- Local and regional authorities
- NGOs and CSOs
- Youth organisations
- Local communities
- Business associations and entrepreneurs
- Cross-border associations

More specifically, identified youth networks/associations/actions that should be contacted and informed about the project are:

- Youth organisations and networks already involved in the Carpathian Civil Society Platform.
- Youth Councils and Municipal Youth Commissions (applicable for the Municipalities which foresee them within their management structure).
- Youth Council of Romania, the main non-governmental partner on youth issues about central authorities and public institutions empowered in the field of youth policies. Currently, the YCR brings together 22 federative structures, with a network of over 400 youth organizations, being the only structure in Romania affiliated with the European Youth Forum and the World Assembly of Youth.
- Brasov Youth Centre. The Centre is the result of a project of the County Directorate of Sport and Youth Brasov; it started its activity in April 2002, as an alternative in the field of information, non-formal education, and leisure for young people in Brasov.



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**9.3.1 THE CARPATHIAN GOALS**

The following table represents the insight collected in relation to the SDGs which were deemed to be of utmost priority in relation to the mountain community-led sustainable development strategy:

SDG Principle	Deemed relevant by	Comments
10 - Reduced inequalities	3/3	<p>Increasing territorial and social inequalities, which weaken social cohesions and strengthen social polarization, should be counteracted.</p> <p>Policies need to be established to progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average; to ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions. Regional disparities, especially in the SVK area, are of the primary concern, although in the last few years, the disparities seem to increase also at the national level.</p>
17 - Partnerships for the goals	3/3	<p>Cooperation and stakeholders' involvement.</p> <p>Partnership should be also intended as adopting and implementing investment promotion regimes for least developed countries; building on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries; enhancing global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence.</p>
4 - Quality education	2/3	<p>The number of youth and adults who have relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship skills needs to be increased, especially to prevent youth migration and low level of entrepreneurship. Develop knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.</p>



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SDG Principle	Deemed relevant by	Comments
8 - Decent work and economic growth	2/3	Particularly relevant in peripheral locations.  Policies should be devised and implemented so to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Development-oriented policies support entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services, with the outcome of reducing the proportion of youth not in employment (especially by the development of professional qualified staff e.g. in tourism).
9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure	2/3	Quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructures have to be developed, especially on a regional and transborder scale, to support economic development and human well-being.
11 - Sustainable cities and communities	2/3	Public transport has to be expanded so as the efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. The local development strategy should support positive economic, social, and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.
12 - Responsible consumption and production	2/3	Tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that create jobs and promote local culture and products should be defined and deployed.
1 - No poverty	1/3	The Carpathian can be characterized by poverty because of its peripheral location (the Carpathian is one of the poorest regions in the EU).
3 - Good health and well-being	1/3	Bad health conditions are the result of poverty, well-being means first of all bringing quality of life to all
13 - Climate action	1/3	-
15 - Life on land	1/3	Relationship between forests and agriculture.
16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions	1/3	The historical legacy of interethnic conflicts and the war currently undergoing in Ukraine both raise this issue.



### 9.3.2 THE CARPATHIAN PROCESS: RISKS, RESOURCES AND CHALLENGES

The Carpathian project actors have identified risks associated with the implementation of the strategy, which can be categorized into four main groups:

1. Risks related to the **context**, as an increasingly deteriorating environment for civil society organizations in the countries of the Carpathians, political instabilities and changes in leadership, the unfavourable governments' attitude towards civil societies and local autonomy, or the legislative constraints and institutional gatekeepers.
2. Risks related to the **willingness to participate**, such as the passivity of local communities, the demotivation of local actors due to lack of interest, or even resistance and opposition from local communities driven by concerns about the impact of the strategy on their traditional ways of life, but also the low support by local and central authorities.
3. Risks related to the **contents** of the strategy and/or their **communication**, for instance a possible mismatch between the strategy and the needs and priorities of the inhabitants, or a low level of familiarity/identification, or even misunderstanding, with the objectives of the strategy among the identified stakeholders and civil society may result, again, in a low level of involvement/unwillingness to implement activities foreseen by the strategy.
4. Risks related to the **availability of resources**, as the lack of sufficient financial resources for the implementation of the strategy objectives, or the lack of expert capacities for strategy-building at a territorial level, can lead to delays, limited outreach, and the inability to implement key initiatives outlined in the Central Mountains project.

The primary resources recognized as essential for addressing barriers, mitigating risks, and building trust within the strategy can be classified into five key areas:

1. Already existing cross-border, transnational and interregional **cooperation programmes**, and the institutions implementing these programmes. More particularly, the position of some PPs in relation to legislative processes and the government could be key.
2. **Shared knowledge base**, driven by robust research and data analysis resources, needed to understand the unique socio-economic, cultural and environmental dynamics of the Alpine-Carpathian region. Informed decision-making based on comprehensive data can help address concerns, enhance transparency, and build trust among stakeholders.
3. **Sharing of experiences** between stakeholders, also supported by qualified individuals with expertise in community engagement, negotiation, and cross-cultural communication. Skilled facilitators and mediators can help navigate challenges, foster dialogue, and build trust among diverse stakeholders.
4. More integrated **multi-level cooperation schemes**, also across borders.
5. National and regional **schemes and funds** to address obstacles, mitigate risks and enhance community engagement, capacity building and strategic initiatives.

The elements that Carpathian partners believe can contribute to the success of the strategy can be organized into five distinct groups:

1. **Preliminary activities**, such as carrying out a credible needs analysis, properly mapping stakeholders, and target groups, and collecting and elaborating relevant knowledge.



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2. The capability to **guarantee equal access to all stakeholders** in the participatory process, also by raising their awareness of the reasons and ideas underlying the strategy development.
3. The capability of the elaborated strategy to reflect the needs of local communities, and to **mobilise their resources** them to implement it.
4. The capability to gain the trust and **support of higher authorities** (i.e., national levels) by leveraging on the importance of local strategies for the country's socio-economic development.
5. The capability to identify smart funding solutions and **access to financial resources**.

When prompted to highlight potential advantages and positive outcomes resulting from the adoption of a participatory and inclusive governance model in the Carpathian area, PPs responded by enumerating the following:

- The possibility to **better understand the complexities of the local context**, its social and economic dynamics, and the cross-border needs; also, the possibility to increase awareness about the cross-border dimension among residents.
- The possibility to **guarantee an equal partnership** between different actors (local, regional governments, local institutions, and civil societies) and thus contribute to social cohesion, strengthening community ties and encouraging collaborative efforts towards sustainable development in the Carpathians.
- The possibility to **advance environmental sustainability** by incorporating diverse perspectives and local knowledge in decision-making processes. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among local communities, promoting more effective and locally tailored solutions to conservation challenges.
- The chance to **support, enhance and modernise existing decision-making processes** in local authorities and at the EU level, in terms of stronger cross-border community governance, by implementing community-based approaches.
- The chance to **propose integrated projects** with a wide budgetary and territorial impact, also by promoting the Carpathians within and outside the region.
- The possibility to have a **tangible impact** on the quality of life of the territory.

As per the Carpathian outlook, the motivation of local communities to actively engage in the local governance process may arise from:

- Stimulus given by the participatory nature of the process, fostering a sense of empowerment by demonstrating that all local voices matter in decision-making processes.
- **Financial** - individual or collective - **benefits**, or other kinds of direct interest, also in terms of increased well-being.
- Willingness to influence **local authorities' decisions**.
- Willingness to **protect local material and intangible heritage**, also mobilised by a sense of pride and identity.
- **Example is given by the capability of the local governance system** to set goals clearly and demonstrate its capacity to solve problems.

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9.4 The Sudetes' Outlook

The project members in the Sudeten area acknowledge that the primary aspect they can glean from the Alpine area pertains to the robust development of the tourism sector, particularly in hosting solutions, and the elevated level of human capital.

On the flip side, the Alpine area can benefit from the experience of the Sudeten area in terms of harmonizing business activities with nature protection and enhancing the trail network, particularly through suitable signage.

Regarding the identification of CBFAs for the project, both partners from Sudetes have pinpointed the Krkonoše Mountains as the area where cooperation with local producers, associations, and authorities can be fostered for cross-border promotion and exchange.

The knowledge related to the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSPT), the Carpathian Civil Society Platform (CSSP), and the Alpine Pearls EGCT is reported to be low. The knowledge of Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFA) is reported to be medium.

Finally, the following categories of key actors and local stakeholders were mentioned by the PPs as relevant to be involved in the implementation of the strategy:

- Local and regional product producers
- Local Action Group management







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**9.4.1 THE SUDETES' GOALS**

The information presented in the table below summarizes the collected insights regarding the prioritized Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of the mountain community-led sustainable development strategy:

SDG Principle	Deemed relevant by
8 - Decent work and economic growth	1/2
11 - Sustainable cities and communities	1/2
12 - Responsible consumption and production	1/2
13 - Climate action	1/2
15 - Life on land	1/2
17 - Partnerships for the goals	1/2



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#### 9.4.2 THE SUDETEN PROCESS: RISKS, RESOURCES AND CHALLENGES

The risks identified by the Sudeten PPs when foreseeing the implementation of the strategy can be grouped into four main groups:

1. Risks related to the **lack of resources**, being human, or in terms of competencies from the governance bodies, but also financial resources.
2. Risks related to the **content of the strategy**, which might become too general, not responding to local needs or the capability of the self-government authorities' structures.
3. Risks related to the **lack of identification** of local partners within the strategy and thus the lack of sense of responsibility for its implementation.
4. Risks related to the **complexity** of the strategy and the difficulty of implementing it.

The main resources identified as key to overcoming barriers/risks/lack of trust within the strategy are the following:

- **Subsidies** from the regional ("Kraj") government.
- **Cooperation** with the tourist management organisations.
- Rich **portfolio** of regional brand holders.

At this stage of the analysis, a member encountered difficulties in identifying the key resources, impeding the categorization of resources according to the definition of the strategic core.

The factors which, in the view of Sudeten actors, can contribute to the success of the strategy, are the following:

1. A detailed **preliminary mapping** of the stakeholders' needs.
2. A good **structure of aims and goals** (long-term, mid-term, and immediate).
3. A strong **sense of ownership** of the process by local actors.
4. The good **quality of the final strategy**.



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When asked to identify the possible advantages and positive impacts of adopting a participatory and inclusive governance model in the Sudeten area, PPs answered by identifying the following:

- The possibility to enhance the **sense of belonging** to the local context, linked to the shared heritage and identity, leading also to a stronger sense of ownership of the local development route. This opportunity is linked with the issue of seeking a new identity for the areas with the former German population.
- A better coordination of activities and **exchange of information** between different stakeholders.
- A more effective environmental **management** (elimination of risks of air pollution, water contamination, forest, and pest management) and local economy development (in terms of, for instance, coordination of events and activities).

According to the Sudeten PPs, the motivation of local communities to actively participate in the local governance process can stem from:

- The interest to **influence relevant decision-making processes**, for instance by reducing bureaucratic barriers and changing local tenders' rules to facilitate access to local companies to public procurement.
- The **sense of belonging** to a wide and important initiative.
- The possibility of **building partnerships** for future projects and funding, by exploiting networking opportunities.
- The hope to **improve conditions of small farms and companies**, as they often have to comply with the same rules as big holdings and multinational companies.
- The possibility to **gain better strategic planning** at the local, municipal, and regional levels aiming at sustainable development.



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### 9.5 Structuring the future of community-led sustainable development areas in CE

- When inquired about **distinctions among the examined areas that offer mutual learning opportunities**, Central Mountains provided similar responses. The Carpathian area could offer valuable insights into integrating environment, wilderness, traditions, and identity into local development. Meanwhile, the Alpine area could contribute by sharing its experiences with advanced tourism development models, encompassing both successes and shortcomings, as well as insights into long-lasting multi-level governance and cross-border structures. **Facilitating continuous horizontal consultation and collaboration among the Cross Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) involved in the project can further enhance the mutual learning process.**
- Findings regarding familiarity with existing cross-border structures (Alpine Pearls EGCT, CSPT, and CSSP) also yielded similar outcomes. The Alpine Pearls EGCT is generally well-known in the Alpine area, while CSPT and CSSP are less familiar. Conversely, when querying Carpathian project partners, the pattern is reversed. This somewhat expected outcome underscores **the necessity to enhance mutual understanding of both the Alpine and Carpathian contexts, including knowledge of the Sudeten areas in both regions.**
- **The goals identified among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) show differences**, as the Alpine area emphasizes sustainability and climate issues more strongly, while the Carpathian area prioritizes ensuring equality and promoting stronger economic development. Nonetheless, as the goals are designed to provide a systematic and structured approach for holistic transformations, the varied priorities identified by project partners based on their geographical areas of focus will be incorporated into the overarching strategy.





## Central Mountains



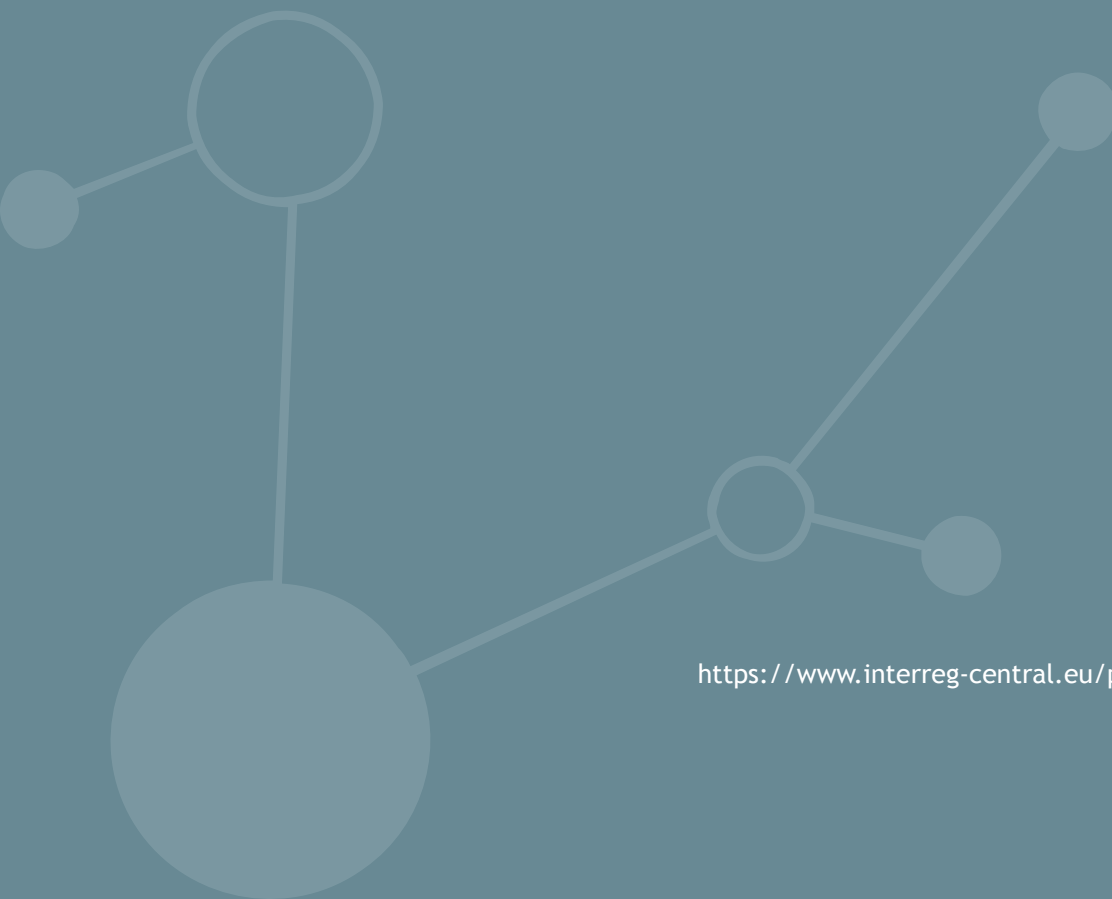
- On the contrary, **identified risks are remarkably similar across different areas**. The most frequently mentioned considerations can be condensed into being cautious about **barriers to participation, barriers to implementation, and external risks**. Responses also offered insights on overcoming these risks, suggesting the development of a well-structured and effective participatory process. Additionally, a preliminary activity involves **identifying the right scaling of goals, leading to the inclusion of pertinent stakeholders** defined by their availability of resources necessary to achieve the established objectives.
  - Certainly, there is a unanimous agreement regarding the **crucial role of economic resources in successfully implementing the strategy**. However, **a range of other resources, extending beyond economic aspects**, has been consistently underscored. These encompass a strong knowledge base at the commencement of the process, **human resources, especially for facilitating participatory processes**, and both tangible and intangible **incentives for participation**. The existing cross-border structures can also be viewed as resources available for the overall process.
  - **Success factors are consistently intertwined with the motivation that can mobilize local communities to engage in local governance processes**. Indeed, the three key factors connecting communities and local governance processes can be summarized as follows: (1) **ensuring ownership, openness, and transparency of the process to foster community attachment, heighten awareness among local stakeholders, and legitimize local decision-making bodies**; (2) translating the strategy into concrete and practical actions over various timeframes, involving both local actors and higher authorities **to avoid frustration stemming from unattainable goals**; (3) ensuring the sustainability of the process by **achieving a long-lasting impact**, including addressing the challenge of securing access to a diverse range of economic instruments to finance the developed activities.
- The holistic approach, encompassing all dimensions of sustainability across fields of action and over time, is another frequently mentioned success factor.







Central Mountains



CENTRAL MOUNTAINS

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