



Editorial

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Dear Readers,

By current economic standards, mountain regions for the most part have a much lower per capita productivity than the areas surrounding them. There are a number of reasons for this, including higher production costs, higher transaction costs, and less dynamic production systems owing to the persistence of socio-cultural traditions. Mountains, however, have the potential to occupy specific economic niches, whether in the production of special plants, the sustainable use of special livestock or wildlife, or the development of mountain tourism.

The Research Section of this issue of Mountain Research and Development consists of contributions that were presented during a workshop of the German Study Group on High Mountain Ecology. The members of this group work in many different mountain regions around the world and meet regularly to exchange ideas and findings. The 1999 annual meeting took place at the Institute of Geography, University of Berne, and focused on the theme of "Landscape Degradation and Environmental Pressure in High Mountains". High mountains are complex and sensitive ecosystems: generally, their reaction to natural change and human interventions is rapid and intense. Therefore, high mountains are finely tuned "indicators" that give evidence of even the slightest influences and changes. The papers in this issue discuss biophysical, sociocultural and political aspects of such changes. The examples presented give insight into various mountain areas around the world: Nepal, Pakistan, Mexico, East Africa, Norway and the Alps. Additional contributions focusing on the European Alps have been published in Geographica Helvetica 55.1 (2000). Support for color reproductions in the Research section of this issue of MRD was provided by the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SAS).

The Development Section of this issue provides some selected insight into economic strategies that may be considered specific to marginal areas in general and to mountain areas in particular. Policy guidance and social organization appear to be core focal points for improving economic activity in mountain areas and mitigating the negative effects of globalization.

Heinz Veit, Guest Editor

Hans Hurni, Editor-in-Chief

Theodore Wachs, Managing Editor