

Editorial

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Dear Readers,

Twenty years after the first International Year of Mountains (IYM2002), the United Nations General Assembly has reaffirmed its commitment to mountain people and ecosystems, and declared the year 2022 International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development (IYM2022). The aim of IYM2022 is to “increase awareness of the importance of sustainable mountain development and the conservation and sustainable use of mountain ecosystems” (UNGA 2021; <https://www.fao.org/mountain-partnership/events/internationalyear2022/en/>). Mountain Research and Development (MRD) is backing this international effort as a pertinent step toward sustainable futures in mountains. The pathways from awareness to action for sustainable development in mountains, however, are challenging and influenced by many factors. Sound knowledge is just one of them, but one that is crucial to informed policies, strategies, and actions. For more than 40 years, MRD has been offering authors from around the world a platform to publish and share their insights into the functioning of mountain social–ecological systems and transformative pathways, as well as to propose well-substantiated agendas for research and policy. In doing so, all these authors have made invaluable contributions to the overall goal of the International Year, that is, to Sustainable Mountain Development. Thank you all for your commitment.

In this editorial, we would also like to express our deep gratitude to our colleague Anne B. Zimmermann for her great dedication to sustainable development in mountains. Anne has been a member of MRD’s Editorial Team since 1999 and served as Associate Editor since 2008; at the end of February 2022, she is retiring from this position (see also the news post on MRD’s website: <https://www.mrd-journal.org/news/anne-zimmermann-retires/>). In collaboration with the Editors-in-Chief and her colleagues at the Editorial Office, Anne played a major role in MRD’s transition to a fully online and open access journal in 2009 (Hurni et al 2009). She was also heavily involved in defining the policies and review criteria for MRD’s innovative MountainDevelopment and MountainAgenda sections (Hurni et al 2009; Hurni et al 2013), which offer peer-reviewed target and transformation knowledge—forms of knowledge that are often underrepresented in scholarly publishing but are key to sustainable development. Moreover, Anne has always been deeply committed to helping less experienced authors improve their writing skills: she has informally provided scientific writing capacity building to countless authors from around the world. Over the years, this has become a hallmark of MRD and an official part of our mission. In addition to her visionary and strategic work, Anne was deeply involved in the daily business of production and in charge of processing submissions to the MountainResearch and MountainAgenda sections through peer review and revisions. Over the past 2 years, Anne has progressively handed over her many tasks to the other team members, ensuring a smooth transfer of knowledge and skills.

Besides her work as Associate Editor of MRD, Anne co-headed the Centre for Development and Environment’s Education for Sustainable Development Cluster. MRD has benefited enormously from her widely recognized expertise in this field, and we are extremely grateful that she is willing to continue sharing it as a new member of MRD’s International Editorial Board. We thank Anne for her enormous commitment over the years and wish her all the best for her retirement.

In line with the aims of IYM2022, articles in this issue present insights that can inform action and policies or inspire further research for transformation toward sustainable futures in mountains. In his MountainDevelopment article, Łukasz Komorowski evaluates how local communities have implemented the smart village concept—an instrument used by the European Union for rural development—in the foothills of the Holy Cross Mountains in Poland. The study highlights the importance of human resources as a success factor with positive impacts on other crucial resources.

In the MountainResearch section, another Polish mountain region is the focus of the article by Agnieszka Nowak-Olejnik and Ewelina Mocior: they investigate how inhabitants in the Pieniny Mountains benefit from a diversity of ecosystem services provided by wild plants from seminatural habitats. However, changes in land use practices are leading to a decline of these habitats and consequently of wild plants. Linking ecotourism with the sale of processed wild plants could encourage the revalorization of wild plants and the conservation of grasslands. The study by Stefano Duglio et al also assesses how local people, this time in the Italian Alps, can benefit from selling local products to visitors. Although tourists are willing to taste or purchase these products, the economic return appears to be limited. Better understanding of the tourists’ behavior is essential to inform adequate strategies to foster and improve the profitability of tourism in such marginal regions. Zhou et al take a different angle and focus on rural residents. They analyze the residents’ sense of place and its complex interlinkages with the process of ecological degradation and restoration in the Huajiang Gorge, China. Considering people’s dynamic and complex sense of place could help to effectively improve environmental governance and promote residents’ wellbeing.

In the MountainAgenda section, Price et al present a synthesis of the International Mountain Conference 2019 in Innsbruck, Austria, that covered a wide range of key aspects of social–ecological systems in mountains. Based on summaries of the thematic sessions and substantiated by recent key literature, the authors provide recommendations that are aimed at informing the orientation of future mountain research.

Finally, in its MountainPlatform article, the Institute for Interdisciplinary Mountain Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences presents its researchers’ views on mountains as research objects. It shows how, by investigating various aspects of mountain systems, they contribute to transformation toward sustainable mountain futures in collaboration with the institute’s international networks.

As usual, the issue closes with reviews of recently published books about mountain-relevant topics. The 3 books reviewed in this issue deal with nature-based tourism in Asian mountain protected areas, primates in the Himalaya, and mountain dialogues from antiquity to modernity.

The editorial team looks forward to contributing to the overall goal of IYM2022, and we hope that the insights published in MRD will benefit you, our readers, as we all work toward sustainable development in mountains.

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