

Focus Issue: The Role of Culture in Transformation Towards Sustainable Development in Mountains

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Dear Readers,

Mountains worldwide are home to a rich cultural diversity, expressed in mountain populations' identities, languages, arts, agricultural practices, socioeconomic arrangements, governance, and music. Most mountain landscapes have been culturally shaped over the centuries by mountain communities, whose worldviews and knowledge about natural resource management they reflect. Mountain areas often play an important spiritual and social role, having a special meaning in people's identities, religions, and ritual practices, or simply being places sought for recreation and social gathering. Yet, mountain communities are undergoing profound and rapid processes of sociocultural change, caused by drivers such as outmigration, urbanization, and increasing integration into the market economy. These changes are undoubtedly threatening the rich cultural heritage found in mountains. However, many mountain communities are responding and adapting to change in creative ways, drawing on their cultural heritage and integrating new knowledge to shape their own innovative and locally-based development pathways. This focus issue addresses such topics and acknowledges the fundamental relevance of culture for sustainable development in mountain areas. It contributes to global knowledge generation efforts that aim to show what role culture plays in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and how culture can be integrated into development practice and policy, as required in UNESCO's recent report on cultural indicators (UNESCO 2019).

In the MountainDevelopment section, 3 papers explore tools and approaches that were adopted by mountain communities in different parts of the world in a context of socioeconomic and policy changes. Saintenoy and co-authors present an insightful reflection and lessons learned from an experience of using the Cultural Route heritage category as an instrument for cultural revitalization and community strengthening in mountains, based on their analysis of a partially failed intervention in the highlands of Northern Chile. Gramm and colleagues, with their cases in the Italian South Tyrol, show the potential of farm-based educational services for children not only for transmitting agricultural traditions to non-farmers, but also for transforming traditional patriarchal values and providing women farmers with new skills and income. In the third article of the section, Yang Zhe et al analyze the adaptive strategies of yak herders on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, who face policy changes aiming at decollectivization of the rangelands that have affected their nomadic lifestyle.

The MountainResearch section also contains a paper, by Gunya and co-authors, that explores different pathways of transformation in pastoralist societies as a result of sociopolitical changes, this time in four regions in the North Caucasus. The authors analyze and compare the factors promoting or hindering transhumance practices based on a study of transhumance actors and institutions over the pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. In another paper, Lopez-Sandoval and Maldonado take us to the Ecuadorian highlands, where they used a social-ecological systems analytical framework to examine the emergence of communal governance practices and their relations with agricultural frontier expansion and grazing activities in the Andean páramos. A third article explores the impact of tourism development on traditional hospitality in the mountains of Georgia. In this study, Gugushvili and colleagues show that new forms of Georgian hospitality emerged in guest-host relationships.

A further 2 MountainResearch articles focus on cultural values and perceptions. In their study, Posch et al investigate the role of values and worldviews on lodge owners' proactive behavior in the face of natural hazards in Mustang, Nepal. Based on their results, they argue that resilience building initiatives should take into account values and worldviews in addition to sociodemographic and socioeconomic dimensions. The study by Badu and co-authors was also carried out in Nepal. In their paper, they analyze the perceptions of community forestry users on the relationship between forests and water. They highlight both the need for additional studies as well as a need for better communicating and deliberating research results to develop sustainable management plans for catchments. The article by Yi-Da An et al, finally, presents a quantitative analysis of Chiang Nationality costumes in China, revealing their spatial differentiation pattern and correlations with natural factors.

In the MountainPlatform section, the Afromontane Research Unit reports on its exponential growth as a young institution devoted to transdisciplinary research on South African mountains. Finally, the MountainMedia section includes the reviews of 5 books of relevance to readers interested in development and sustainability in mountain regions.

This focus issue is the result of a thematic collaboration with the Russian journal Sustainable Development in Mountain Territories (SDMT; <http://naukagor.ru/en-gb/>). Both journals are publishing a focus issue on the role of culture for sustainable mountain development in parallel, based on the same call for papers. Our aim with this effort is to enhance scientific exchange between communities from different languages and mountain regions.

With this final issue of volume 39, 2019, we would like to heartily thank our International Editorial Board (IEB) members for their continuous support of the journal over the past 3 years. We look forward to working with a renewed and enlarged IEB for the period of 2020–2022, as of issue 40.1 of MRD. We close this editorial on a very sad note, as we announce the passing of our IEB member Esther Mwangi (14 December 1965–5 October 2019). Esther was principal scientist with Forests and Governance at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and served as a valuable member of our IEB since 2017. Our sincere condolences go to her family, friends, and colleagues around the world.

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