

Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions: Southeastern Europe and Sustainable Mountain Regions: Challenges and Perspectives in Southeastern Europe

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Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions: Southeastern Europe

Edited by Georgi Zhelezov. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016. xiv + 404 pp. Hardcover: US\$ 129.00, ISBN 978-3-319-20109-2. E-book: US\$ 99.00, ISBN 978-3-319-20110-8.

Sustainable Mountain Regions: Challenges and Perspectives in Southeastern Europe

Edited by Boian Koulov and Georgi Zhelezov. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016. xvi + 268 pp. Hardcover: US\$ 129.00, ISBN 978-3-319-27903-9. E-book: US\$ 99.00, ISBN 978-3-319-27905-3.

The countries of southeastern Europe—usually considered as including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey—are among the most mountainous in Europe. According to the criteria used by the European Environment Agency (EEA 2010), the proportion of their area that is mountainous varies from 40% (Croatia) to 90% (Macedonia). However, as noted in some of the papers in these two books, criteria used in national definitions of “mountain area” in the region differ from one country to another and sometimes even within one country.

The two books have similar titles, share an editor, and appear to derive from the five meetings of the Southeast European Mountain Research (SEEMORE) network from 2010 to 2015. Presumably because scientists from outside the region were invited to these meetings, both books contain papers referring to research in the Alps and

Carpathians, so their scope is actually wider than the titles of the books suggest. A first edition of the book edited by Zhelezov was published in 2011; this second edition includes new chapters, and others have been updated. The book edited by Koulov and Zhelezov appears to be the proceedings of the SEEMORE meeting in Borovets, Bulgaria, in May 2015. Both books are well produced and have many color figures and maps; though the quality of some figures could be better.

Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions includes 27 chapters, grouped into 5 parts: global problems and mountain regions (3 chapters); nature resources and land use in mountain regions (11 chapters); social, economic, and regional problems of mountain regions (7 chapters); nature protection, conservation, and monitoring (4 chapters); and networks and strategies for mountain regions (2 chapters). Eight of these chapters refer specifically to Bulgaria, and there is at least 1 chapter referring to each of the other countries in the region, as well as 3 from the Alps and 2 from the Carpathians. There is considerable variation in the spatial focus—from entire countries to their mountains, to rather small case study areas—and in approach, from very descriptive to highly technical. *Sustainable Mountain Regions* includes 19 chapters and is also grouped into 5 parts: sustainable policies in mountain regions (2 chapters); natural resources and ecosystem services—adaptation to climate change (5 chapters); mountain economies (3 chapters); mountain ecology, risks, and protected areas (6 chapters); and population and heritage challenges (3 chapters). A total of 11 chapters refer to Bulgaria, in two cases also considering other countries (Macedonia, Serbia); there are single chapters referring to Greece and Turkey, and 3 each from the Alps and Carpathians. Again, there is

considerable variation in both spatial focus and approach. Given the extremely wide range of topics, there is no space here to comment on specific chapters in either book.

The preface of *Sustainable Mountain Regions* emphasizes the need for the European Union (EU) to have a regional development strategy that prioritizes mountain areas. During 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for an “Agenda for EU Mountainous Regions” to form the basis of an EU strategy (Price 2016). Many of the chapters in these two books provide useful pieces of evidence on which such a strategy, and actions to implement it in southeastern Europe, could be based. However, they are largely case studies. What is needed, but sorely lacking, in both books is a synthesis and an analysis of gaps in knowledge for the mountain areas of a region that has undergone major political, economic, demographic, and environmental changes over the past three decades since the end of the socialist period and, in the case of the states of former Yugoslavia, during and since the wars of the 1990s. Individual chapters examine many of these changes, which often appear to have been accentuated in mountain areas.

Overall, these two books provide a snapshot of recent research across many disciplines in the mountains of southeastern Europe and underline the importance of the continued existence of a network of scientists, such as SEEMORE, that can contribute both to increased knowledge of these mountains and to providing evidence to inform policies. They also show that there is an imperative to develop a regional mountain science agenda, such as the one developed for the Carpathians by Science for the Carpathians (www.carpathianscience.org), which, like SEEMORE, was catalyzed particularly by the Mountain Research Initiative. However, as noted in both books, a major difference between the Carpathians and southeastern Europe

is that while the Carpathian Convention was signed in 2003, discussions over many years have not yet led to a convention for the mountains of southeastern Europe (see Debarbieux et al 2015). In the Carpathians, both the development and implementation of the convention were critical factors in undertaking comprehensive and comparable mapping of diverse characteristics across the mountains of all the region's countries; for southeast Europe, this has not been done explicitly, although some relevant data can be found, for example, in EEA (2010).

For most people interested in the mountains of southeastern Europe, my recommendation would be to go to Springer's website, identify specific

chapters on topics of interest, and download them. In the future, I hope that a book will be published that will go beyond previous attempts (eg Price 1995, 2000) to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the current status and many challenges for sustainable development in the mountains of this highly diverse and rapidly changing region.

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