

Convener:

Hoffmann Ch., *EURAC Research Institute for Regional Development; Italy*

Title:

Rural – urban relationships to enable equivalent living conditions in the Carpathians

Session description:

The Carpathians, which are considered as a remote, peripheral mountain territory, suffer from the societal, political, economic and spatial delimitation from urban centers. Due to new technical facilities, these classical associations have changed in recent years. The access to broadband technologies, the 4G network and the expansion to 5G, enable new service provisions, information exchange, spatially detached linkages. Coupled with favorable natural conditions due to climate change and a unique landscape scenery, some Carpathian communities may be experiencing a rural renaissance. Digital Hubs, political cohesion measures and finally social innovation enable a favorable environment for new economic opportunities. Lacking accessibility to services of general interest, low-skilled job and education opportunities, low-productivity, lacking integration in regional and national governance processes might thus be mitigated. Spatial disparities become flattened and the rural - urban divide gets limited when approaching a territorial justice that puts human rights and dignity into the center. On the contrary, less favored Carpathian communities, continue to struggle with depopulation, de-growth, obsolescence, land abandonment and a severe change of the cultural landscape scenery. But even for these disadvantaged areas, which perceive that they are politically and socio-economically left behind, the opportunity of the spatially independent digital interlinkage between rural and urban areas for exchanging information and services might already offer additional benefits and perspectives.

Significant incentives for the Carpathians emerge from the European cohesion policy. European funds enable re-valorization of endogenous potentials and cultural identity of the Carpathians by activating community-based innovation processes under the lead of local key actors. Through promoting local talents and innovative entrepreneurial skills, the spirit of “smart villages”, which can facilitate typical products or new and smart value chains enters into the Carpathians.

Nevertheless, this will not stop young people in their urge to move away from the Carpathian villages to discover the unknown, when they intend to transfer or to study in a big city or abroad. Rather, it is the challenge of the Carpathian communities to stay attractive for returners and new highlanders, because they bring prosperity and new ideas. Their visions make them into incubators for innovation and progress. And these are major driving factors for the quality of life and the future viability in smart Carpathian villages.

Any contributions dealing with questions of territorial justice, services of general interest, rural urban relationships, digitalization of mountain communities and mountain hubs, de-growth scenarios or rural renaissance phenomena from Central and Eastern Europe, with a focal point on the Carpathians, including Climate Change or governance phenomena, influencing the socio-economic or socio-ecologic transformation of the Carpathians, are highly welcome.