

MOUNTAIN POPULATION AND HUMAN VALUES: DOES THE MOUNTAIN STILL REPRESENT THE EXPRESSION OF FREEDOM?

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ABSTRACT: Mountain Population and Human Values: Does the Mountain Still Represent the Expression of Freedom?

The paper approaches the topic of the mountain population in the context of human values. In the context of the year 2022 declared by the United Nations as the Year of Mountain Development, studying mountain issues is a necessary step. For the inhabitants of the mountain area, the expression of freedom was given numerous times by the mountain. People took shelter in this area and developed accordingly by exploiting the mountain potential. The research for this paper was carried out exploratively, by studying various sources on mountain science. The results conclude to the current mountain picture of many areas around the globe, which presents, from an infrastructural point of view, an image of some underdeveloped or developing areas. The work captures important valences of the mountain area and offers solutions for mountain development.

Keywords: *freedom; human values; mountain people; mountain area.*

The mountain area in the context of human values

From the beginning to the present, the mountain has been the expression of human freedom and liberation from various kinds of domination. In

the Bible, for example, the express reference to the word mountain is made more than 580 times, the context being the same: the mountain represented shelter for the human being. The population, who wanted to escape from the torments of the oppressors or flee from the path of foreign invasions, turned the mountain into a temporary home, a veritable shelter for survival. In contemporary times, the structure of invasions and wars has changed, as a result the valences of humanity in the mountain area have undergone changes. Today's mountain population is no longer fleeing from barbarian invasions, but from poverty and current mountain difficulties created by poor infrastructure and technology, underfunding, depopulation, etc. The mountain population, custodians of culture and good customs, tend to dilute their value-oriented discourse in favor of mercantilism and globalization. In this context, the addressable question of causality is „does the mountain still represent the desired freedom?“

Specialists in landscaping, especially in the area of montanology, believe that the mountain offers a special beauty, its value and uniqueness being incomparable to that of other relief areas. The mountain has long been associated with the strength of masculinity and divinity, being considered awesome, mighty, steep, rocky, mysterious, barbaric, wild, remote, massive... and the list goes on... The barbarian mountain, more barbaric than the cotropitors from which previous generations fled... The mighty mountain, stronger than globalization and mercantilism. And the mountain population is molded on the mountain prototype. Over time, mountain populations have learned to become true communities of resistance, the mountain being their strongest ally and natural screen. The mountain landscape and the mountain population have structurally changed considerably in the last century. But, not to such a great extent as the other areas or populations. Consequently, the advantages of contemporaneity can be capitalized in order to preserve the positive mountain valences and for the development of the native space so that the mountain and the mountains are winners.

The reduced investments per surface unit (in the mountainous area a km square on orthogonal projection on the map can be twice or even more, depending on the slope of the land in the respective mountain system), compared to the figures per capita, show that the mountainous area is still underutilized. The argument for low investments is given by the lack of population density in mountainous areas. The introduction of technolo-

gy without an initial assessment of the needs and priorities of local groups, regarding socio-economic, cultural and ecological dimensions, deepens the discrepancy between developed and underdeveloped mountain areas, between mountainous and hilly or lowland areas. Investments in mountain areas must consider not only the immediate effect and local return per capita, but the current insertions of funds in mountain areas must be seen as an investment in the future, in the development of humanity. This, for many reasons, among which we mention the less polluted ecosystem and with high self-regeneration capacity both for the constituent mountain areas and for the areas in the adjacent areas (mountainous, hilly or plain). From this investment in the future, not only the mountains will gain, but the entire socio-economic environment of a country. Another problem present in the mountain infrastructure is related to the technologies inserted in the mountain areas, technologies that are thought for hilly or plain areas. The adaptation of technologies to mountain areas is an immediate necessity, the actors of this area depending on the dynamics of the existing infrastructure. Many of the dimensions of mountain cohabitation are dependent on the cultural, social, economic and technological development of the mountain space. Among these causal dimensions can be mentioned the education and the need for appropriate programs, the qualification of the labor force adapted to the occupational requirements specific to the mountains, the provision of a solid foundation for professionalization and the accumulation of new skills, the development of public and private governance, the provision of appropriate urban and rural sustainability, the technological and socio-economic unification of small holdings (which are isolated and fragmented), the support of different categories of mountain populations according to needs with an emphasis on attracting young people to mountain areas, the specific prioritization of policies dedicated to the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors for each mountain area of the economy or the combination of sectors according to the potential of the area. The list of arguments for the development of the mountain area and the existing needs could go on, but the main idea considers the importance of ensuring the sustainable development, competitiveness and smart sustainability of the current global mountain heritage. The economic policies of the mountain states of the world should provide for measures dedicated to the mountain areas they own. Government mechanisms applicable to some mountain areas can be adjusted according to existing state and/or

regional policies in correlation with existing risks and uncertainties, so that the mountain spectrum is as strongly stratified as possible.¹

The mountain and the mountain people, the expression of freedom

The mountain population participates in supporting a symbolic universe: the mountain cultural and spiritual area. The mountain people speak a special language - the „mountain language” - which they firmly and tenaciously support. Sometimes mountain dialects are understood only by locals or mountaineers from other mountain towns. This specificity is still preserved even in the most globalized regions, which is why a certain language is not intelligible in every area.

Mountaineers are keepers and continuers of specific mountain customs, both positive and negative. Their tenacity comes from the struggle with the difficulties of nature and the environment in which they coexist with other creatures or phenomena. The struggle for survival, even under the conditions of globalization, is much more difficult in the mountainous area than in other areas. Consequently, the hardness of character of the mountains increases in rhythm with the vicissitudes they have to overcome. In the less globalized mountain areas of the world – Asia, Africa, South America, Euro-Asia – the mountain population operates as in the previous century, meeting herding, annual nomadic cycles, hunting for survival (not for relaxation), etc. In such still primitive societies, hunting from wild fauna and gathering vegetables from wild flora are still the main sources of food and forms of survival. These two are preferred because they do not pose such important dangers to human work. In contrast, the practice of agriculture from controlled flora has many risks, such as floods, drought, destruction of crops by animals or other people. The same concerns apply to controlled wildlife, with highlanders experiencing problems with voluntary or involuntary loss of livestock. In this context, the mountain people, especially in the highlands, prefer to practice agriculture from the spontaneous flora and fauna. Mountain people, organized in small family-oriented and clan-centered groups, are tough and approach existence realistically. There resides in these people an ancestral or spiritual cry, far from mountain existence or invocation of divinity, which makes anyone

1 Rao, K. S. (1997). *Natural Resource Management and Development in Himalaya*-. ENVIS Monograph, 1.

possessing even half of the mountain qualities able to survive in harsh conditions. Mountaineers do not have much time for cultural-spiritual activities, which is why they are compressed. In a work-oriented society, leisure activities cannot take up too much time or space. In such a society, survival techniques are an important basis of mountain development.

The mountain mentality in the society of human values

The process of development, migration and acculturation induced the growth of mountain socio-cultural identities representing a tribal/non-tribal continuum. It is thus observed that a prototype of the traditional mountain tribal societies is foreshadowed, which even in the current context of globalized development prefers to isolate and protect the existing socio-cultural and economic-technological dimensions. In non-tribal hill societies, this tendency is less than in tribal ones. However, with the gradual improvement of communication and the expansion of globalization, hill tribal societies are increasingly influenced by the valences of neoliberalism and capitalism. Considering the presented context, agriculture, the primary sector of the dominant economy in the mountainous area, represents the mainstay of the native populations. In the situation of intensively applied agriculture, the mountain area faces a more intensive exploitation of natural resources than the other areas. In many situations the process is irreversible and this fact is felt at the level of many mountainous areas of the world, the consequences having different degrees of reversibility. The gap between per capita mountain resources and needs, between supply and demand, intensifies in close correlation with the degree of exploitation, with human intervention - positive or negative, with the capacity of the ecosystem to self-regenerate and with the investments made in the respective mountain area. Capital infusion, related to more developed mountain areas, ensures enhanced sustainability for a region. Mountain immigration and emigration are dependent on the development trends of the respective mountain area, which is why investments can ensure the competitiveness of the respective areas. One of the most important problems of mountain ecosystems is environmental destruction, especially through voluntary deforestation that leads to poor biological productivity, soil erosion, hydrological imbalances, floods and other natural hazards, as well as low potential economic utility, including social disparity- economic.

Mountain areas are structurally differentiated according to altitude, so that with increasing altitude, mountain systems are characterized by i) lower rates of abiotic, biotic and cultural exchanges; ii) slower rate of growth; iii) aging and late maturity; iv) lower reproductive efficiency and v) greater resistance to climatic and socio-human conditions.²

Such areas have a less visible impact of environmental problems, having a healthier ecosystem, which is why mountain agriculture is considered to be the luxury agriculture of the future. More precisely, mountain agriculture will be the agriculture dedicated to people with high financial possibilities and will be able to afford better quality food. The impact of natural hazards increases in parallel with the altitude, humanity having to find the most suitable areas for the professional practice of mountain agriculture. Degradation of natural forests, especially mountain forests, is a global problem, not just local or regional. Another problem of mountain spaces is the lack of support by public and private governance of mountain producers, with mountain products remaining at the local level where they are less well financed than if they were sent to areas with capital inflows and higher food preferences. Consequently, mountain actors must be involved in supporting the added value chain and protecting the environment.

Range patterns and mountain populations

Mountain populations are different from each other longitudinally and transversely than populations in hilly or lowland areas, especially due to the isolation of mountain settlements that converges in conservatism. The ethnic composition differs from one population to another, even if the mountain massif in which these populations are located are within the same region or country.

In the following, some models of mountain populations will be presented, which represent prototypes of the mountains of America and Asia.

The mountain population of the Appalachians was initially constituted as a homogeneous cultural group and formed predominantly of Scots, Irish and English, most of them Presbyterians, and characterized by independence, fatality and cultural and geographical isolation. Natively, these people possessed diminished abilities to fall in love, be affectionate,

2 Rao, K. S. (1997). Natural Resource Management and Development in Himalaya-. ENVIS Monograph, 1.

loyal, and responsible, with an exaggerated predisposition to violence and immoral behavior. Over time, this mountain population became a category with antithetical anomalies, as simultaneously barbaric and civilized, attractive and repulsive, creative and naïve, possessing mountain characteristics both masculine – wild, cruel, untamed and mysterious, and feminine – caring, family-oriented, tradition-bound and friendly.³

The Himalayan mountain population differs anthropologically from other mountain populations, both externally to the Himalayan societal and internally between constituent groups. Mountain populations in this area differ in many dimensions, the most relevant being multiple race/ethnic composition and group/societal size. In the Northeast of the Himalayas, the populations are Mongoloid, with features and behaviors specific to this race, with high asperities and cultural-religious components diminished to immediate needs. The groups in the West and Center of the Himalayas belong to Indian societies, being predominantly oriented towards a cultural-religious life of an ancestral type and having milder character traits. In this culture, the number of women employed in agriculture and specific mountain trades dominates the labor market compared to that of men. Although the Himalayan range is less polluted than others, the degradation of the ecosystem produces considerable adverse effects. As in the other mountain massifs, deforestation is intensifying the problems of the Himalayan natural environment. The phenomenon is neither spatially nor temporally isolated. So deforestation has been a constant problem since the 18th century. In the Himalayas, degradation of forest potential is a primary problem that develops a variety of other problems, such as soil erosion, slope failures, depletion of soil fertility, shortage of wood and fodder, landslides, reduced groundwater recharge, loss of biological diversity. The rise in the water level of the rivers in the lowlands is given by the repercussions of the degradation of the vegetation cover in the Himalayas. The degree of vegetation damage also depends on a number of other factors, such as the intensity of tourist education, socio-cultural and natural regeneration patterns, etc. In the Himalayan range the natural vegetation is dense, diverse and more stratified in the Northeast than in the Northwest. Due to being closer to Southeast Asia, tropical plant species are more

3 Weaver, B.J. (1996). What to do with the mountain people. *The symbolic earth: Discourse and our creation of the environment*, 151-175.

abundant in the Northeast Himalayas and undergo a gradual numerical decline toward the Northwest. The elements of temperate climate with coniferous forests and tropical climate with African accents lead to a decrease in climatic intensity from North-East to North-West. The cooler and drier climate of the Northwest supports germplasm rich in temperate fruits, while the warm and humid climate of the Northeast supports germplasm rich in tropical fruits such as citrus. Although occupying 15% of the country's geographical area, the Himalayas nurture 28.8% of the country's endemic dicotyledonous flora. In the Himalayas, deforestation heralds irretrievable loss of biological diversity. The expansion of agriculture on marginal land and declining harvests are considered major unsustainable trends in the Himalayas. Constant growth of cultivated areas in response to population expansion will be sustainable when the attitude of farmers towards the natural environment changes and when new technologies, especially agricultural ones, are accepted. An upward trend of the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy is noticeable in the Himalayan space, the development activities of these sectors can damage the natural ecosystem and, implicitly, the ecological agricultural production in the region. The mountain population of these areas is forced to abandon the agricultural lands and look for alternative ways of ensuring livelihoods because the mountain agricultural systems in certain Himalayan areas no longer provide the necessary food security.⁴

Discussion and proposals

Many hypotheses and conclusions can be formulated about the mountain area and for the mountain area. All the thinking constructs about the mountain area converge towards the same idea, that is, the mountain area represents added value for the entire global ecosystem. The mountain area ensures high sustainability of the global supply-production-distribution value chain. The current mountain situation, especially the agricultural and rural one, requires major investments that will have the impact of equalizing the chances of the highland areas with the hilly or plain ones. In ensuring the policies oriented towards mountain sustainability, the particularities of this area and the subsequent parts are imposed as primordial through the prism of the special specificity of this area.

4 Rao, K. S. (1997). *Natural Resource Management and Development in Himalaya*-. ENVIS Monograph, 1.

The authors adhere to the research carried out by Professor Rao in 1997 and concretize that specific development policies ensure special contribution to the mountain area. The planning of mountain development policies must ensure transversal and longitudinal continuity of sustainability, but above all the competitiveness of the mountain area. Mountain economy, or mountain science in a broader approach, can ensure a stable balance between different sciences that all support intelligent development in the mountain area. Focusing on the needs of the mountain area and the mountain population is achieved, at the ideological, axiological and praxeological level, through the mix of humanistic, social, economic and technological policies. Public governance and private governance play a decisive role in the successful implementation of global, regional, national or local policies. The realization of capital investments must take into account the development programs oriented towards dynamic interventions, mainly directed locally. For less developed mountain areas, the governments of the respective states can facilitate direct or indirect foreign investment by favoring the development of the adjacent entrepreneurial environment. Development programs can be better achieved by emphasizing the local ecological and social specifics and less by unpolished takeovers of international policies. Technological transfer from the plains to the mountains requires superior investment, but the satisfaction increases exponentially with the capital infusion. The mentioned gain meaning, direction and relevance by ensuring an integrated management of all mountain resources.

In the year declared by the United Nations as dedicated to the sustainable development of mountains, 2022, the efforts of mountain actors must focus on reducing/eradicating poverty and mitigating the development gaps between the mountain area and the other areas. Protected and controlled agriculture ensures better sustainability of the mountain area than the agriculture of spontaneous flora and fauna. Some mountain areas of the world present a full spectrum of natural, human, social, economic and technological pressures.

As the researcher Farswan also reiterated in 2016, the holistic and integrated approach solves most of the problems of mountain area policy design. The development of mountain areas must be carried out sustainably, sustainably and intelligently without technology and economy coming into conflict with the socio-humanism of the area under consideration, more precisely by ensuring biodiversity and the mountain social network.

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