

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL - PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN TWO EUROPEAN RURAL BORDER MID-MOUNTAIN REGIONS

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Abstract

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The main aim of this article (the paper is included in the context of a research project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology – code: SEJ-2006-15331-C02-02) is to further our understanding of two mountain rural areas occupying two distinct geographical environments: the Spanish Pyrenees and the Austrian Alps. I am particularly interested in examining the management practices that have been adopted as part of the public policies implemented in two mid-mountain regions - areas that do not have the same possibilities for development as those enjoyed by high-mountain environments. These places suffer structural problems resulting from low levels of agricultural competitiveness, accompanied by factors that impinge negatively on land use (which, in turn, condition their landscape management practices). Finally, I reflect on the differences between the two regions and their future possibilities.

Key words

marginal mid-mountain rural areas, spatial planning and mountain policy, agrarian landscape, Spain, Austria, Pyrenees, Alps

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1. Introduction

1.1 General approach and clarification of concepts

The article aims, first, to identify the similarities and differences between two mid-mountain territories located in two different parts of the European continent: the Pyrenees and the Alps. In particular, I seek to examine the different processes by which public policies of a spatial nature have been implemented to address the specific concerns of mountain areas: territorial planning and development, on the one hand, and landscape management via the adoption of sectoral policies, on the other. I seek to find answers to the three questions posed in my research which structure the results presented below:

- How have these two areas evolved in confronting the structural problems that they have suffered and which they continue to suffer?
- What have been the official government responses (implemented in their regional policies) in seeking to overcome these challenges?
- What has been the impact of this regional dynamics and of the associated political discourses on the landscape?

Two theoretical premises concerning two key concepts in the article must be clarified. The first is concerned with the idea of *mid-mountain areas*. This concept is used widely in academic contexts, and is used here to designate those mountain areas that have been marginalised to the extent that they do not receive any specific attention (unlike the so-called *high mountain* areas, which are frequently the object of symbolic representations in both cultural and political discourses). In the Spanish academic context, the concept has traditionally been associated with physical geography, but today it has been incorporated within other approaches including landscape dynamics (Lasanta 1997). In German geography the term *Mittelgebirge* is used, and in Alpine contexts reference is made to the *Alpine margin* (*Alpenrand*: Lichtemberger 2000) to contrast with the nucleus of the mountain range.

Second, the notion of *landscape* that I adopt has a cultural focus, in that the term is used to designate “a set of objective elements (physical and tangible) contemplated by different subjectivities (persons or individuals)” (Ojeda Rivera 2004, 274). I use this idea as a means of examining complexity, where landscapes “are natural and cultural footprints objectively present in each region (which we can see and walk over) and subjectively in each perception (which we can value and connote)” (ibidem 2004, 274).

Due to the complexity of the above questions, the methods adopted comprise various techniques aimed at achieving the proposed objective. Among these techniques the most important is field work (including interviews), underpinned by the premise of maintaining contact with the regions being studied. This approach reduces the difficulties inherent in any comparative study. Undertaking a study of two extremely different areas always involves additional complexities which relate to: seeking a correspondence between the terms adopted in the two academic contexts, which are distinguished by different visions and perspectives; and constructing a discourse that can ensure an appropriate balance in dealing with each area of study.

1.2 Geographical summaries of the case studies

As it has already been mentioned, two territories are analysed: la Terreta, a valley situated in the historical region of la Ribagorça, straddling the territories of Catalonia and Aragón), and die Metnitzer Berge in the easternmost Alps (the Niedere Tauern group, straddling the provinces of Styria and Carinthia).

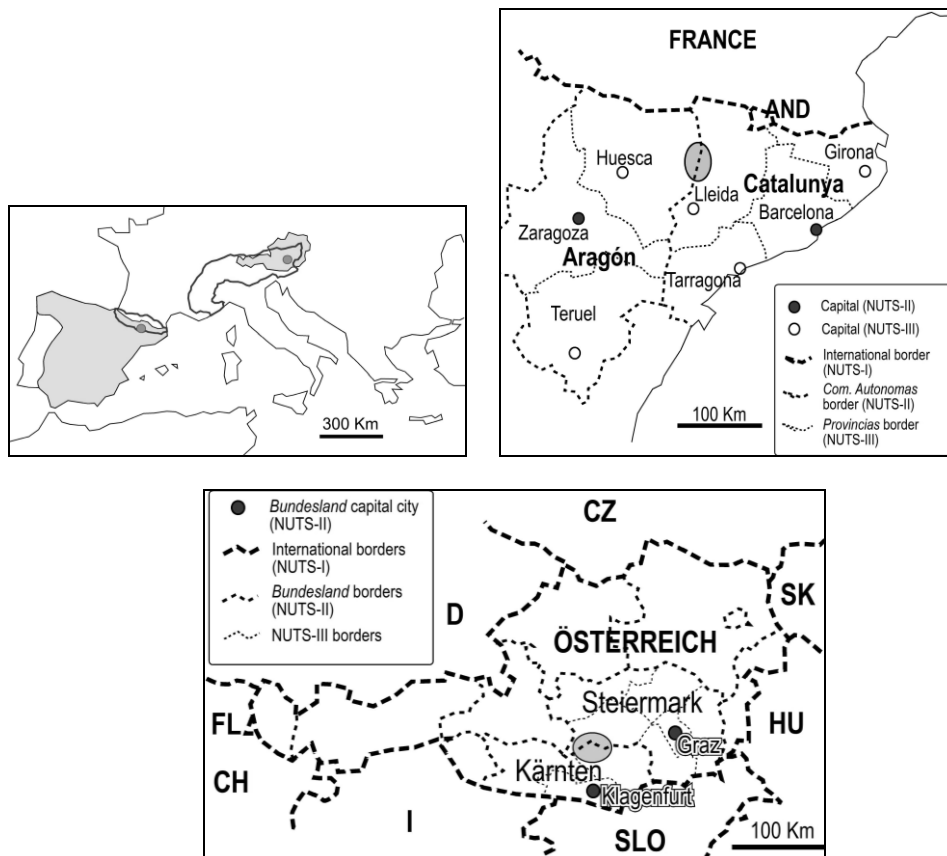


Fig. 1: Study cases' geographical location in Europe and location according to their administrative context: La Terreta in Spain, Metnitzer Berge in Austria (highlighted with circle).

Source: Author

The two territories are located far from the main axes of their respective mountain ranges. Not only are they physically distant, but they can also be considered to be located far from the geographical and historical elements around which the territory has become organised. In the Terreta, as in all of Spain's central Pre-Pyrenees, the traditional way of life has centred on agrarian practices organised in family units, in a physical backdrop characterised by a highly broken relief. By contrast, the peripheral location of the Metnitzer Berge (together with its crystalline nature) has resulted in the development of a sizeable forestry economy where individual subsistence activity has combined with a dominant role played by the large landowner.

The vicissitudes of the last century and a half in Europe have exacerbated the marginal nature of both regions. I refer, specifically, to their transfrontier character, with both areas straddling two historically divided units – the regions of Aragon and Catalonia in the first case, and those of Carinthia and Styria in the second – with borders that have tended to remain or to gain importance in the recent decades, with the consolidation of the modern Spanish and Austrian states.

The relief features of the two spaces, however, highlight a fundamental difference. While the Terreta forms a section of a valley divided administratively along the river (la Noguera Ribagorçana, the axis around which the area is structured), the Metnitzer Berge constitutes an upland area separated by political-administrative borders that traverse, virtually always the line formed by the highest points. In addition, it is not possible to equate a historically homogenous region (la Ribagorça) against two areas delimited quite clearly along a geographically defined watershed (a division that has contributed to the establishment of two differentiated communities).

Be that as it may, the marginal nature of the two regions is beyond question, if we bear in mind the historical processes that have given rise to their current situation. Historically, the inhabitants of the Terreta have predominantly exploited the valley's resources, while maintaining a series of relationships in equilibrium with the surrounding territories (Tremosa 1991). Today, the density of its population is less than 2 inhabitants/km² (Sancho 2008), and it has lost 83% of its population in the last 70 years. Agrarian and forestry practices are largely residual, and the possibilities for reform are complicated.

The Metnitzer Berge has also experienced far-reaching changes with the introduction of capitalism to the Alps. As a consequence, this section of Gurktaleralpen has an ageing demographic structure (more than 20% of the population is over 65 years old), together with a (slow, but progressive) loss in overall population (10% in the last 140 years) (based on census - <http://www.statistik.at/blickgem>). Moreover, the difficulties of jump starting an economy that presents little added value, and an agrarian territory in direct competition with forestry land uses, are self evident. This tendency is recognisable above all on the southern slopes, a valley that ends in a cul-de-sac (Metnitztal, in Carinthia); but less so in the north (Oberes Murtal, the high Mur valley in Styria).

2. Results

The results of the research are organised in three sections. First, I analyse the most important territorial changes undergone by the two areas. Then, I turn my attention to the field of public policy with the greatest repercussions for the territory: local and regional planning instruments and development strategies. And finally, I link together the main elements in the institutional discourses concerning the landscape, based on public intervention in mountain policy and the promotion of the territory for tourism.

2.1 Peripheral, rural and mountainous regions in Europe. Geohistorical background

In the context of the marked changes experienced by Europe's mountain regions over the last 150 years, the case studies analysed here illustrate two examples that could be classified as "losers" in these processes.

The Terreta is an example of an extensive mid-mountain territory (in the Pre-Pyrenees, as opposed to the higher altitude central axis of the mountain range) that began to undergo major changes around the mid-19th century (1850). At that time, the point of the greatest prosperity coincided with the impact of measures, taken by the new liberal state, in particular the process of disentanglement, on the territory. With the objective of making a financial profit, attempts were made, through privatisation, to incorporate into the market economy areas of land for farming or forestry, which until that time had been in the hands of the Church or local corporations. However in many places, including the Terreta, these measures represented no more than a nominal change in ownership (the lands were not auctioned off, and a formal appropriation by the local residents of the municipality occurred).



Fig. 2: Landscapes of abandonment: Reduction of cropland and settlements in Sapeira (la Terreta).

Source: Author.

Some studies (Sabio Alcutén 1997) associate these circumstances with the origins of decline in Spain's mountain territories. In the Terreta, demographic pressure led to crop rotation in the shrubby borders of the marginal land won back from the woodland, which was characterised by very poor soils; and in a Mediterranean context such as this, the gradual disappearance of the forest was inevitable. After 1950, when the whole of the Ribagorça region was integrated into the state economic system, a rapid demographic decline occurred that has resulted in the present situation. Only in the last decade has the arrival of new outsider groups (with new ways of thinking and alternative styles of living, initially linked to the so-called neo-rural phenomenon (Nogue 1988) arrested the rate of social and economic decline.

The case of Metnitzer Berge is illustrative of the evolution undergone by the eastern sector of the Austrian Alps, a sector with a markedly different dynamic from that of

the western one (Lichtemberger 1965). Here, the forestry economy has historically played a key role. The production of timber was closely tied to the domestic production of iron ore in the region's forges, until its decline after 1870 (Soukup, Türk 2003). This crisis led to an initial acceleration in the zone's depopulation rate (a process which, however, had an earlier origin), as well as to the historical process of the introduction of extensive farming and the progressive disappearance of small farms throughout this Alpine region.



Fig.3: Landscapes of abandonment: Expansion of the forest over alpine pastures in the Metnitztal.

Source: Author.

Around this date, in Metnitzer Berge and throughout the Eastern Alps in general, there was a gradual increase in the forested area; a process that was a response to the same root cause (reforestation programmes for timber production) championed by different protagonists at two different points in history. During the period known as *Gründerzeit* (between the second half of the 19th century and the interwar years), the pressure groups in the area consisted of the timber industry and the large landowners (both from the nobility and Church). By contrast, after the WW2 (and particularly after the 1970s), it has been the action taken by the local farmers (and, hence, small landholders) that has permitted the expansion of the forested area (Čede 1998). As a result, the forests have invaded the territory of Metnitzer Berge: from having been limited quite strictly to areas in the shade, they have erased areas of pasture and croplands, or even today's permanent settlements.

2.2 Regional planning at the frontier

In this section I specifically focus on the mechanisms of cooperation that the regional planning tools include in an attempt to overcome the disruptions caused by the regional frontier. In doing so, I concentrate on regional plans and local development strategies.

2.2.1 Regional scale

The internal organisation of the Spanish and Austrian states has evolved along similar lines: both originate from a centralist tradition, and both have today become decentralised states: adopting a federal model in Austria (Bätzing 2008), and the so-called "model of the autonomies" in Spain (Serrano Martínez 2005).

This has led, as far as regional planning is concerned, to the adoption of these powers by the regional units (NUTS-2 regions): "Bundesländer" in Austria and "Comunidades Autónomas" in Spain. I should, however, point out the fundamental difference that determines the different application of each of these models. Spain is a state which does not have any primary legislation governing its regional planning to which the autonomous communities are subject (Benabent 2005), nor has it a tradition of inter-territorial cooperation (Romero González 2005). By contrast, Austria does have mechanisms and institutions responsible for the interstate coordination of regional planning among the three main actors undertaking this function (the Federation - *Bund*, the federal states and the municipalities): this role is fulfilled by the Austrian Regional Planning Conference (Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz).

Clearly, the differences in scale hinder the possibility of placing the two Comunidades Autónomas and their mountainous regions (subject to their own planning tools) at the same level as those of the two Bundesländer and each of their planning regions. However, I present a series of features that might serve to sum up the state of regional planning in both study areas:

- In the Spanish case, the fundamental difference is that Catalonia can call on its instrument (Pla Territorial Parcial de l'Alt Pirineu i Aran) that includes elements of physical planning (with cartographic documents that reflect the various land use categories); Aragon, on the other hand, only has recourse to directives (Directrices Parciales de Ordenación del Territorio del Pirineo Aragonés), which while legally binding, require subsequent development at a much more detailed scale. Beyond these differences, both models are similar in conception: starting from a general document, they divide their territory into units which, later, receive more detailed attention.
- In the Austrian case, Styria, like Catalonia, also employs a physical planning instrument and a "cascade" strategy (Styria depends on the Landesentwicklungsprogramm) on which each of the Regionale Entwicklungsprogramme also depend. This is not the case of Carinthia, which does not yet have a general development strategy, but rather it possesses a strategy (without physical planning) for each development area or region. (Note: In Carinthia the Strategie zur Landesentwicklung -STRALE! K is currently being implemented, and which the various Regionale Entwicklungsleitbild are joining.)
- Therefore, parallels can be drawn between the territorial planning models of Styria and Catalonia, on the one hand, and those of Aragon and Carinthia, on the other.
- Finally, while in Austria the development instruments at the district level (*Bezirk*) are regional in nature (the study area is divided between the districts of Murau (Styria) and Sankt Veit an der Glan (Carinthia)), in Catalonia and Aragon, however, the district (*comarca*) development plans are legally part of the local system. (Note: In the case of the Catalan sector of la Terreta, the Pla Comarcal del Pallars Jussà applies; the Aragonese sector must be governed by the *comarcal* strategy of the Comarca of La Ribagorza (still to be applied)).

In terms of territorial cooperation between government entities at the regional level, an illustrative example took place in Austria under the appellation “Lungau-Murau-Nockgebiet Region”, created in 1978; it was a working project conducted jointly by the *Bundesländer* (Salzburg, Styria and Carinthia) and was transversal in nature (Note: Verbindungsstelle der Bundesländer beim Amt der Niederösterreichische Landesregierung 1979). At the end of the 1990s, however, the initiative was frozen (the last meeting was held in 1997). Although within various authorities there is talk of reviving the meetings, it is significant that there is no reference to it in the latest ÖROK report (ÖROK 2008). All the municipalities of the Metnitzer Berge were included in the region.

In the Spanish case, no precedents exist for regional cooperation at the trans-frontier level in the neighbouring zones of Aragon and Catalonia. This situation is repeated throughout the state owing to the lack of initiative taken by the Central Government in generating transversal policies, and because of the centrifugal forces that derive from the establishment of regional governments.

2.2.2 Local scale

Regarding the cooperation at local level, two aspects should be stressed. First, in the context of Spain, a large number of municipalities (most of which are in mountain zones) do not have their own planning tools (PGOU or POUM - Plan General de Ordenación Urbanística Municipal and Pla d’Ordenació Urbanística Municipal); which is not the case in Austria, where every municipality has its Flächenwidmungsplan or urban plan. Second, the two case studies show certain contradictions in their municipal divisions: in the Terreta, this is of fundamental importance for much of its territory; in the Metnitzer Berge, by contrast, there is one specific instance that affects a given village.

Associative solutions allow the town halls to share various aspects of their public management obligations – those for which they are unable to take responsibility on their own. This is the case of the associations of municipalities (the so-called *Mancomunidades de municipios*) in Aragon or, at another level, of the districts in Catalonia. The subsequent establishment of the *comarcas* has meant the disappearance of many of these associations. The former *Mancomunidad de Municipios de la Ribagorza Oriental*, including the municipalities of the aragonese Terreta has been recently suppressed 7 years after the creation of the wider *Comarca de la Ribagorza*. The Catalan *comarques* are entities that developed out of the free association of municipalities. Moreover, their significance extends much further than any associative formula. In any case, the *comarca* provides certain public services jointly (Note: like refuse collection in the *comarca* of Pallars Jussà, in our case study). Today, these procedures are evolving towards other areas of activity, which include (in addition to administrative matters and those of primary services) joint strategies for regional development.

The most intensive work in this field is being conducted in Styria, through the entity of the “little region” (*Kleinregion* - all the municipalities in the study area belonging to this *Land* form part of a *Kleinregion*). These are associations of municipalities with a fairly well-established history (the first dating from 1981) that allow, in addition to the pooling of services, the sharing of local planning strategies. The solution is also present in Carinthia, albeit for the time being, on a more limited scale. It should be remembered, however, that these initiatives fall outside what is strictly speaking the

task of regional planning, being more closely related to strategies of regional development. In Carinthia, this policy has encountered additional obstacles in large municipalities resulting from mergers of the 1970s (Brunner 1991).

Returning to the Terreta, a hitherto untried initiative in the area is worth highlighting. It involves an association of municipalities of Ribagorça (*Associació pel Desenvolupament de la Ribagorça Romànica*) lying in both autonomous communities, created *ex professo* to manage a pilot project, developed by the State Government (Ministry of Agriculture) within the framework of the development of a new law affecting rural territories (Sustainable Development of the Rural Systems Act - Ley 45/2007, de 13 de diciembre, para el Desarrollo Sostenible del Medio Rural).

Yet, relations between the two sides of the frontier are marked by permanent shortcomings. One example of this is the management of protected spaces, which is being undertaken independently by each municipality without any form of collaboration (although the mentioned planning documents specifically refer to the need to coordinate the management tasks).

The systems developed for undertaking coordinated tasks between Styria and Carinthia in the Metnitzer Berge are also not operating optimally. The most significant example of this is to be found in the project designed to build "thematic" highways, in this case centred on the world of timber production. The so-called *Holzstraße* involves a basically transversal policy (the idea being to link tourism with the timber industry and environmental measures). But, precisely for this reason, what stands out is the fact that there are two different thematic highways (one in each *Bundesland*) without any obvious connection between them.

2.3 Landscape discourses as expressed in sectoral policies

Certain policies of a sectoral nature can have a profound impact on the landscape, but they also express, indirectly, the way in which the society conceives the landscape. Below, I offer various interpretations of these facts, as well as of the discourses that underpin them. In so doing, I shall concentrate on mountain policies and, explicitly, on the management of agrarian activities and tourism promotion.

Albeit the matter of mountain agriculture is longstanding in several parts of Europe, there are major differences concerning the way in which public authorities have handled the issue in the two study areas here as regards. In Austria, the state has historically implemented a strategy clearly aimed at protecting mountain agriculture (Lichtemberger 1965; Hovorka 2001), which has decidedly not been the case in Spain. The former organises farming into four categories according to which state subsidies are awarded; by comparison, the latter (Note: both at the level of the state and the *Comunidades Autónomas*) there is a marked absence of general, systematic measures (which means it is very difficult to establish what the main initiatives have been in this field).

At the present time, the promotion of tourism represents the main line of discourse in mountain areas. In this regard there exist a number of largely parallel initiatives in both case study areas, determined by a series of features: an absence of any tourist tradition due to the impossibility (or, in the Austrian case, the slight possibility) of developing winter sports activities; and, as a result of this, the

attraction of certain features within the territory (associated with its natural or cultural components), which serve as the lynchpins for strategies of tourism promotion.

In these terms, in the Terreta (specifically in the Catalan part) a tourist product has been developed based on its wildlife resources which exploits the relative anonymity of the area to attract alternative tourism (ecotourism, bird watching). On the other hand, the councils belonging to Aragon are also exploiting their architectural and archaeological resources in establishing a tourist product that is built more on the sum of its individual parts (Romanesque architecture, museums and interpretation centres) than any particular internal coherence. Likewise, some efforts have been made in the Metnitzer Berge to promote products such as former pilgrim routes, its gastronomy and the aforementioned timber industry. The strategy to promote tourism, however, seems to be well consolidated: at the regional level a number of tourist labels have been developed (like the “holidays region” – *Urlaubsregion*), which employ a joint strategy.



Fig. 4: Institutional awareness upon territory: “Urlaub am Bauernhof” near Metnitz.
Source: Author.

Rural tourism plays a particularly significant role, because it is called to be the element around which the economic foundation of these rural territories will be integrated. This form of tourism is common in both cases, albeit with marked differences in its implementation. The situation in the Metnitzer Berge shows that the Austrian strategy of the *Urlaub am Bauernhof* (“holidays on the farm”) is well established, even in those places that face the greatest difficulties in setting it up. The success of the model lies in two closely related factors: the fact of having ensured that the initiative is being taken by the local populace, and of having established a national network that guarantees good quality. In the Terreta, although recently the number of rural tourism establishments has increased markedly, there is no truly common strategy for promoting these establishments,

nor for certifying their services. The connection between the owner and the customer is limited to the provision of accommodation; unlike in Austria, where each house (which remains a working farm) normally offers activities related to farming.



Fig. 5: Institutional awareness upon territory: forgotten and almost disappeared village (Escarlà, La Terreta).

Source: Author.

All these characteristics point to the existence of major differences in how a landscape is conceived from one place to another. For example, within several of the strategies implemented in the Terreta an indiscriminate emphasis is placed on the supposedly "natural" component of the landscape (local plant life and fauna). The cultural landscape (Note: as the result of the processes outlined in section 2.1) is omitted (involuntarily or deliberately) from these foci. It comes as no surprise that one of the consequences is the high degree of disconnection between the owners of farm land and tourists. The result of this *neglect* of the landscape (Fig. 5) and the peripheral nature of the region results in a form of management that is poorly integrated and the victim of political-administrative duality; despite the attempts made in the last few years in the area of landscape management (like the Catalanian Landscape Act in 2005 - Llei 8/2005, de 8 de juny, de protecció, gestió i ordenació del paisatge), the latter is a resource of limited relevance in Spain's public policies.

The defence of the landscape understood as the historic product of human intervention in the territory is somewhat difficult in the Metnitzer Berge. On the one hand, it is no straightforward task to stem the impoverishment of the present-day landscape (spontaneous growth of woodland and loss of landscape diversity); even with the support granted to mountain farming. On the other hand, we are unsure whether the academic discourses (that warn of the problems caused by not supporting the landscape in mid-mountain regions) are captured within its tourism

promotional material. What undoubtedly is captured, however, are the attempts at linking agrarian and forest activities with tourism, despite the factors that hinder this (such as the reticence shown by the timber industry and large landowners). The Metnitzer Berge has, nevertheless, the basic requirements to be able to maintain a demand for high quality products, with easy traceability and a consumer demand *in situ*.

3. Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis undertaken, the following final thoughts can be recorded:

- The mid-mountain areas with all their demographic and economic problems (as outlined in this article) are peripheral spaces within a relatively central area (in the case of Austria), while they are peripheral spaces within the periphery (in the case of Spain).
- The difference between the cohesive nature of regional planning in the Austrian state and the absence of planning instruments to facilitate coordination between *Comunidades Autónomas* in Spain has had a definitive impact on the regional policies of each of these regions.
- Despite the relatively long tradition in some instances in the use of spatial planning tools at the regional level, the recent introduction of most of these instruments means that it is too early to draw any definitive conclusions as regards their use. However, a number of worrying failings have become manifest: the absence of a planning instrument for the whole of Carinthia, and the failure to develop the planning tools requested by the Directives of the Aragon Pyrenees are just two examples.
- Albeit is widely accepted that mountain agriculture is inadequate to serve as the motor for the economic structure of the regions analysed here, a major difference between the two states in their approach to this activity should be pointed out. The Austrian discourse recognises the difficulties associated with primary activities, but has chosen to strengthen their role in society (regardless of its role as productive activity). On the other hand, the Spanish discourse is unaware of the extra-economic role of mountain agriculture. This difference is indicative of the gap existing in all respects regarding the social awareness of cultural landscapes in the two cases.
- Spanish current society (partially including Catalan and Aragonese), having undergone a drastic transformation in the last 60 years (with the rural exodus), has recently rediscovered in the mountains a territory adjoining its urban environs; a territory that has not however been able to provide the collective imagination with a coherent and solid inheritance, nor with a consolidated landscape culture. By contrast, Austria, since 1945, saw the formation of an eminently rural society, and even with the processes of industrialisation and migration from the countryside to the city, it has never lost the link with its landscape culture.
- In the Spanish case, cultural landscapes are awaiting recognition (the agrarian landscape of the Terreta is present in individual and collective memories, but not in any official discourses), whereas, in Austria, there is a broad consensus between society and institutions, which has enabled them to widen the bases of the debate around the future of its landscapes.

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FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL - PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN TWO EUROPEAN RURAL BORDER MID-MOUNTAIN REGIONS

Summary

This paper attempts to understand some current spatial processes being worked out in European mid-mountain landscapes. To do so, two different mountain areas were selected: a valley section in the Spanish Pyrenees (*la Terreta*, in the historical region of *Ribagorça*), and an uplands sector in the Austrian Eastern Alps (*die Metnitzer Berge*, in the *Niedere Tauern*). Despite the numerous differences between them, there are some relevant features which permit us to undertake a comparative assessment. For instance, both areas have been marginalised to the extent that they do not receive any specific attention (unlike the so-called “high mountain” areas). This fact is intensified due to their cross-border characteristics: the Terreta is divided between two Spanish regions – *Comunidades Autónomas* (Catalonia and Aragon); the Metnitzer Berge extends between Styria and Carinthia, two Austrian provinces (*Bundesländer*).

Within this context, the purpose of the paper is to examine the different processes by which public policies of a marked spatial nature have been implemented to address the specific concerns of mountain areas: territorial planning and development, on the one hand, and landscape management via the adoption of individual sectoral policies, on the other. Qualitative methods were used (evaluation and assessment of management tools and specific literature; analyzing the discourses underlying public policies), in combination with some quantitative data from statistical sources. On the other hand, in-depth interviews were carried out with several actors (local authorities and population in the Spanish case, scientific actors in the Austrian one).

The results are organised in three sections. First, the historic processes underlying the present territories are presented. Second, planning policies (including management tools at several spatial scales) are evaluated. And finally, the main elements in the institutional discourses concerning the landscape are assessed, and the public intervention in mountain policy and the tourism promotion of the territory are taken in account. Thus the following facts can be highlighted:

First, both areas have suffered a decline during the last 150 years, although of different intensity: a drastic migration process in the Terreta in comparison with a smooth and gradual demographic decline in the Metnitzer Berge.

Second, the administrative context at the State level in both cases is conducive to unevenness in territorial management at the regional level. Such dysfunctions are especially highlighted within the Spanish model of *Comunidades Autónomas*, which does not possess specific coordination tools typical of federal states like Austria.

And third, rural tourism was adopted as the main economic activity for the future in both cases, although with a critical difference: in Austria, agricultural activities are considered necessary, while in Spain its role in mid-mountain areas is often ignored. It is true that many common aspects between the two case studies can be identified, in a historical, geographical and administrative sense, and the difficulties faced are often similar. Nevertheless, approaches and especially political strategies to overcome the current situation do not coincide. If Austria wants to guarantee its internal (national) territorial cohesion, it must assume that the mountains should be

considered as an essential part of its territory. In my opinion, this is the situation. By contrast, Spain has great difficulties to define the role (both economic and social) of its mountain areas. As a result, the former has a basic consensus regarding a coherent mountain policy (a consolidated mountain agricultural strategy nationwide, supporting links between peasantry and tourists through rural tourism). This is so despite each *Bundesland* having its own management policy, and despite the fact that the debates about the threatened future of cultural landscapes are far being from solved. By contrast, in the Spanish case (despite the experience concentrated especially in Catalonia), one can note a lack of public recognition and commitment regarding the diverse dimensions of the landscape of mid-mountain areas. In this sense, a fashionable (but extremely distorted, because of its narrow-minded mentality) ecocentric focus must be restated.

