

Governance Pathways for Reviving Left-Behind Mountain Regions

This Special Issue from the MARGISTAR forum will examine what factors worsen the vulnerability of mountain regions, and how governance and policy can foster their revival and long-term sustainability.

Regional inequality remains one of the most pressing social and environmental challenges of our time. While global policy frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the principle of *leaving no one behind*, persistent disparities between urban centers and rural, mountainous areas risk deepening marginalization. These “left-behind” regions, often characterized by geographic remoteness, demographic decline, land abandonment, and limited access to services, are particularly vulnerable to systemic neglect.

Mountain regions across Europe and beyond are facing multiple, coevolving pressures: depopulation, aging communities, the abandonment of traditional land uses, climate-related hazards, and social (im)mobility. Holistic governance approaches that are adaptive, inclusive, and rooted in place-based knowledge are urgently needed to counter these trends.

This Special Issue seeks to contribute to current debates on regional inequality by addressing two interlinked questions:

1. What factors increase the vulnerability of mountainous regions to being left behind?
We invite contributions that examine the structural and emerging drivers of marginalization in mountain territories, including demographic trends, socioeconomic transformations, governance gaps, and landscape degradation.
2. What governance approaches and policy pathways can foster revitalization and long-term sustainability in these regions?
We seek empirical and conceptual contributions that explore multi-actor governance models, innovative planning tools, and community-led initiatives that enhance resilience, regenerate landscapes, and improve wellbeing in mountain areas.

Submissions may focus on (but are not limited to) the following:

- Depopulation, aging, and rural–urban migration
- Transformation of landscapes and land use in mountain areas
- Abandonment and revitalization of traditional livelihoods
- Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based planning
- Digital governance and inclusive stakeholder platforms
- Conflict-sensitive governance in multispecies landscapes
- Evidence-informed policy and participatory scenario planning
- Green jobs and sustainable mountain economies

- Integration of ecosystem services into rural development strategies
- Governance innovations for mountain-specific challenges

The Special Issue is guest-edited by a group of researchers from [MARGISTAR – A European Forum for Revitalisation of Marginalised Mountain Areas](#), a European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action funded by the European Union. It focuses primarily on European mountain regions, but is open to high-quality contributions from other global mountain contexts, provided they address the central themes of the issue.

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