



# THE COHESION POLICY SUPPORTS INNOVATION IN MOUNTAIN AREAS

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Innovation is too rarely associated with mountain areas. But, in practice, due to many factors such as their remoteness, lack of services and climate-related challenges, mountain residents have always been dynamic and innovative. Here, innovation goes beyond technological and digital solutions, and it can be used to address many issues related to society, the environment, the local economy, and so on. This is what we call social innovation.

## **WHY IS INNOVATION SO IMPORTANT?**

Climate change, globalization, depopulation and ageing societies are some of the major challenges that currently affect mountain regions. Their impacts are often a heavy burden, and innovation is vital to respond to these challenges and keep mountain regions alive.

## **WHAT SOLUTIONS ARE BEING FOUND IN THE MOUNTAINS?**

In these territories, satellite technology, tele-medicine and the extension of broadband infrastructure are a few examples of digital innovation that can respond to local needs for services and foster local development. In parallel, social innovation also empowers mountain communities to find solutions to unresolved social needs, such as youth unemployment, and to support new collaborative forms of knowledge creation in the mountains.

**Through the Cohesion Policy, the European Union finances projects and initiatives to boost innovation in mountain areas.**

**Browse these pages to find out more.**



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# RURAL BROADBAND

## Closing the broadband gap in white rural areas

White areas are areas with no Internet infrastructure. In Europe, many mountain regions are white areas and hence local businesses, students and workers experience the negative impacts of this digital divide in their educational, job and social opportunities.

In Greece, a gigantic project aimed at developing broadband infrastructure was conducted across 61 prefectures, covering 45% of Greek territory. About 5,077 villages and 525,287 residents in mountainous regions and other marginal areas, such as islands and rural areas, now have 24/7 access to a broadband network for their personal, social and professional use.



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**Mountain area:** All rural mountainous surface of Greece

**Cohesion support:** European Regional Development Fund

**Period:** 2014-2019

**Website:** <http://nga.gov.gr/index.php/development-of-broadband-networks-in-white-rural-areas-rural-broadband/?lang=en>

# ONE CLASS!

## One network for online education

Access to educational opportunities and training is an issue for people who live in remote areas. For this reason, the Basilicata Region in Italy decided to promote eLearning solutions based on the “pluri-class” system in 7 regional schools, including primary and secondary, 2 high school institutes, and 2 children’s hospitals.

In practical terms, the pluri-class methodology applied the satellite technology of the European Space Agency to create a virtual class with students physically located in different isolated and remote areas.



© Victoria Borodina

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, students from 29 classes were able to attend synchronized teaching of their normal courses using videoconferencing, and also had access to a cloud eLearning platform containing additional educational content. Thanks to the satellite technology, students could benefit from a larger network of classes and fellow students despite the geographical location of their schools.

**Mountain area:** Italian Apennines

**Cohesion support:** European Regional Development Fund

**Period:** 2017-2020

**Website:** <http://europa.basilicata.it/fesr/progetto-one-class-open-network/>

© MiSMi



## Integrated medicine for inclusive mountains

In the mountains areas of Tarentaise (France) and Valle d'Aosta (Italy), the welfare system is challenged by an ageing population, depopulation and the deterioration of social capital. To counter these issues and create a new welfare model adapted to these territories, the MisMi project developed 2 main innovative actions.

A tele-consultation platform was installed in different consultation stations so that local patients can access remote doctors from their mountainous area. Doctors can monitor the health situation of mountain residents more regularly, prescribe further examinations and administer certain treatments, such as tele-physiotherapy, remotely. Citizens can now also request local services thanks to the appointment of 3 community organizers and local care givers who guarantee the prevention and early detection of health problems, such as arterial hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and heart failure.

The introduction of tele-medicine and a local service means that vulnerable or chronically ill people in mountainous areas can stay in their homes longer while having full access to healthcare.

**Mountain area:** Italian- French Alps  
**Cohesion support:** European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg ALCOTRA programme  
**Period:** 2017-2020  
**Website:** <https://www.mismiproject.eu/>

## SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

### Social innovations to engage young people in mountain regions

Mountainous areas often offer a more limited range of educational, training and employment opportunities for local youth. This is a particular problem in the southern region of Bulgaria, where a significant number of young people are neither in work nor in education.

To support youth entrepreneurship and encourage self-employment in innovative economic niches with a great social impact, the National Youth Forum of Bulgaria launched a project in collaboration with the School of Industrial Development (Spain) in 2019. Thanks to this project, several young residents of Bulgaria's mountain regions attended digital and on-site courses on social innovation and how to set up their own business, with a specific focus on the circular economy and health tourism. They subsequently participated in mentoring and incubation programmes to further implement their social innovations in either of these two fields.



© Bulgarian National Youth Forum

**Mountain area:** Southern Bulgarian mountains  
**Cohesion support:** European Social Fund  
**Period:** 2019-2021  
**Website:** <https://nmf.bg/social-entrepreneurship/>

# MONTANHAS DE INVESTIGAÇÃO

## A collaborative laboratory for mountain value chains

Situated in the North of Portugal, the Montanhas de Investigação collaborative laboratory recruited 39 highly skilled professionals, including 7 PhD holders and 4 PhD students, thanks to the support of the European funds. They include experts in geosciences and geology, social sciences, mountain ecosystems, agriculture, food and industrial engineering.

Their mission is to find solutions to problems related to the competitiveness and societal challenges of Mediterranean mountain areas. These 24 experts are working with local, regional and national actors to support new businesses, mobilize local value chains, transfer knowledge and interact with public and private actors. In doing so, the group focuses on mobilizing the complete value chains and leveraging innovation and industrialization in order to strengthen the economy and society in general.

So far, the group has set up 17 projects covering issues such as the valorization of olive oil subproducts, reducing food waste, and the conservation and valorization of cultural heritage.

Mountain area: Trás-os-Montes region (Portugal)  
Cohesion support: European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund  
Period: 2019-2022  
Website: <https://morecolab.pt/en/home/>



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## WHAT IS MONTANA174?

Montana174 is a communication campaign to inform you – mountain residents - about the many opportunities offered by the Cohesion Policy in mountain areas.

In mountain areas, the Cohesion Policy provides funds to reinforce digital and social innovation, accelerate climate mitigation and adaptation, support tourism, foster youth employment and enhance mobility.

[www.montana174.org](http://www.montana174.org)



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