

The Carpathians: Integrating Nature and Society Towards Sustainability

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The Carpathians: Integrating Nature and Society Towards Sustainability

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Katarzyna Ostapowicz,
Andrzej Bytnerowicz, and
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642-12724-3.

Although Europe contains many mountain ranges, most are shared by a rather small number of nation states. In recent decades, particular attention has been given to two ranges shared by a larger number of states that have recognized shared concerns: the Alps and the Carpathians. For both of these ranges, the governments of the concerned states have signed binding legal conventions, and scientists have created collaborative networks that have held regular meetings and developed and implemented research programs. These processes started earlier and are thus more developed in the Alps. In the postsocialist era, scientists working in the Carpathians have benefited from the experiences and support of their Alpine colleagues, political imperatives related to the implementation of the Carpathian Convention, and global initiatives such as the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI). The volume and diversity of research conducted in the Carpathians have grown very significantly.

This substantial book begins with a short introduction by the editors, which briefly describes the biogeographical characteristics of the Carpathians, the two major sets of processes that followed privatization in the 1990s and 2000s (land abandonment/forest succession and urbanization/large-scale investment in tourism), challenges to regional cooperation, and the structure of the

book. This is effectively the proceedings of the first Forum Carpaticum, held in Kraków in 2010 as an open meeting of the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) initiative established in 2008, as described in the second introductory chapter by Astrid Björnsen Gurung of the MRI. It is perhaps worth noting that, in 2012, S4C signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention that gives S4C the status of “official partner” and aims to strengthen collaboration (Debarbieux et al 2014).

The rest of the book comprises 44 chapters, from 3 to more than 20 pages in length, by more than 100 authors from 10 countries. They are divided into 4 parts, each starting with a useful introductory chapter by one of the editors that provides some context for the following chapters and briefly summarizes them. The 10 detailed chapters in Part 1 consider the abiotic environment, with papers on natural hazards, climate changes and their impacts, water chemistry, and monitoring of hydrotechnical structures. Part 2 addresses many aspects of forests, which cover two-thirds of the area of the Carpathians, with significant challenges for their management deriving from past and ongoing interactions of diverse factors including changing policy and ownership regimes, air pollution, and climate change. The 11 detailed chapters describe silvicultural and forest characteristics and various aspects of management, including some prospective studies from Ukraine, where stakeholders’ perceptions of forest ecosystem services are also described. Part 3 is entitled “The human dimension” and includes 11 detailed chapters, 5 focusing on the cultural landscape and biodiversity, and 6 on tourism and industrial and urban development. Two of these concern study areas that are outside the Carpathians but are of relevance there, given commonalities with the region. Part 4 is entitled “Methods” and includes 11 chapters, of which the first 6 focus on data collection

and preprocessing and the others on data analysis. Many remote sensing and GIS applications are covered.

Overall, this book represents a snapshot of research in the Carpathians at a time when collaboration was becoming a reality; and the 2010 Forum Carpaticum has been followed by others in 2012 and 2014 (see www.forumcarpaticum.org). The editors are to be commended on their efforts in bringing this body of research to an international audience, although they could also have added to its value by using their introductory chapters to each part not only to summarize the chapters in it, but also to provide a literature review to put the chapters in the context of existing knowledge. In addition, given the range of topics included in the book, an index would have been very useful. Crucially, another outcome of the 2010 Forum Carpaticum was a research agenda for 2010–2015 (Kozak et al 2011), and a new one for 2015–2020 is in preparation. It is notable that the latter is expected to include a greater emphasis on social science issues. This represents an evolution from the strong emphasis on natural science at the beginning of the decade, of key importance given the ongoing changes in all aspects of the region’s socioecological systems.

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