

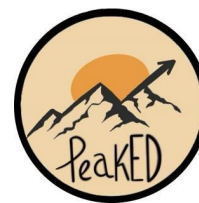


PeakED: Environmental Involvement and Education for Young Entrepreneurs and Volunteers

**Green Strategies for the
mountain areas**



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1. INTRODUCTION

Mountain areas are complex territories where nature, culture, economy, and community life are interconnected. They are living spaces where rural populations have developed traditional practices, local food systems, spiritual meanings, and cultural identities over centuries. (Romeo et al., 2022; FAO, 2022). For this reason, any green strategy for mountain areas should move beyond a narrow environmental approach. It should combine biodiversity protection, sustainable tourism, climate resilience, local entrepreneurship, cultural heritage, and community participation. (Romeo, 2023).

Within the Peaked project, the participating countries offer different but complementary mountain contexts. Greece is represented through Mount Olympus, a mountain of exceptional biodiversity and mythological significance. Bulgaria is represented through the Rila Mountains, where protected ecosystems coexist with one of the most important spiritual and cultural landmarks of the Balkans, the Rila Monastery. Poland is represented through the Carpathian Mountains, a transnational mountain system that supports biodiversity, rural communities, and traditional highland culture. Jordan is represented by Jabal Umm ad Dami and Wadi Rum, where desert mountain landscapes are connected to Bedouin heritage, arid ecosystem resilience, and community-based tourism. (UNESCO, n.d.).

The purpose of this report is to analyse these mountain areas separately and then connect them through broader green strategies and policy themes. The report focuses on existing strategies and policies for mountain areas; the role of tourism in valuing natural and spiritual heritage; the connections among nature, rural, and mountain tourism; and practices for promoting sustainable food systems and adding value to local products.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE MOUNTAIN AREAS

2.1 GREECE - MOUNT OLYMPUS

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Mount Olympus is the highest mountain in Greece and one of the most emblematic mountains in Europe. Its importance is both ecological and cultural. From an environmental perspective, Olympus is known for its rich biodiversity, varied altitude zones, and high number of endemic plant species. Its location between the Aegean coast and the inland mountain mass creates different microclimates, allowing many habitats to coexist within a relatively limited area. (UNESCO, n.d.; European Environment Agency [EEA], 2020).

The ecological value of Olympus is closely linked to its status as a protected area. Conservation policies focus on the protection of habitats, species, forest ecosystems, and sensitive alpine zones. The mountain is also exposed to pressures that are common in many Mediterranean mountain areas, including climate change, wildfire risk, erosion, unmanaged visitor flows, and pressure on popular hiking routes.

From a cultural perspective, Olympus has a unique identity as the mythical home of the ancient Greek gods. This gives the mountain a symbolic value that extends far beyond national borders. Visitors do not approach Olympus only as a hiking or nature destination, but also as a place connected with mythology, ancient religion, storytelling, and collective European memory. This creates an important opportunity for sustainable tourism strategies that combine environmental interpretation with cultural education

A green strategy for Mount Olympus should therefore focus on balancing access and protection. Tourism can support local communities in nearby villages, but it should be carefully managed so that trails, forests, and sensitive habitats are not degraded. Sustainable guiding, environmental education, visitor limits in sensitive areas, interpretation centres, waste reduction, and cooperation with local producers can strengthen the role of

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Olympus as a model mountain destination. (European Commission, n.d.; EEA, 2020; IPCC, 2022).

2.2 BULGARIA - RILA MOUNTAINS



The Rila Mountains are the highest mountain range in Bulgaria and the Balkan Peninsula. They are known for their glacial lakes, forests, alpine meadows, and high biodiversity. The area includes protected ecosystems and is connected with Bulgaria's natural heritage. Rila is also one of the most important spiritual landscapes in the region because of the Rila Monastery, a major cultural and religious site. (UNESCO, n.d.; Rila National Park Directorate, 2023).

The main challenge for the Rila Mountains is to manage the relationship between conservation and tourism. Areas such as the Seven Rila Lakes attract large numbers of visitors, especially during peak periods. While tourism brings economic opportunities for local communities, uncontrolled visitor pressure can damage fragile alpine environments, increase erosion, disturb wildlife, and create waste management problems.

Green strategies in Rila should focus on sustainable visitor management, protection of sensitive ecosystems, and better integration between cultural and nature tourism. The Rila Monastery already attracts cultural visitors, while the mountain landscape attracts hikers and nature tourists. A more integrated approach could connect these experiences through educational routes, local guiding, interpretation of biodiversity, and promotion of nearby rural communities. (European Environment Agency [EEA], 2020; IUCN, 2020).

Rila also offers strong potential for local products and sustainable food tourism. Mountain herbs, dairy products, honey, and traditional Bulgarian cuisine can be connected with tourism experiences that support local producers. In this way, tourism does not remain

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limited to sightseeing but becomes a tool for strengthening local economies and preserving traditional practices. (FAO, 2022; UNWTO, 2021).

2.3 POLAND - CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS



The Carpathian Mountains form one of the most important mountain systems in Europe. In Poland, the Carpathians are associated with biodiversity, forests, pastoral landscapes, traditional villages, and highland culture. They are part of a wider transnational mountain region, which makes cooperation between countries essential.

The Carpathian Convention provides an important policy framework for the protection and sustainable development of this region. It promotes biodiversity conservation, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage protection, sustainable forestry, and cooperation among mountain communities. This is relevant for Poland, because the Polish Carpathians cannot be understood as a national landscape; they are part of a wider ecological and cultural system. The Polish Carpathians face challenges such as land-use change, infrastructure pressure, forest management conflicts, climate change, and tourism concentration in popular destinations. However, they also offer significant opportunities. Traditional highland culture, pastoralism, wooden architecture, local music, crafts, and food products create a strong basis for rural and cultural tourism. (European Environment Agency [EEA], 2020; IPCC, 2022).

A green strategy for the Polish Carpathians should support community-based tourism, sustainable mobility, protection of wildlife corridors, preservation of traditional pastoral landscapes, and promotion of local products. Tourism can play a positive role if it supports local families, cooperatives, and small enterprises, rather than creating mass tourism models that place pressure on the environment. (UNWTO, 2021; FAO, 2022; IUCN, 2020).

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2.4 JORDAN - JABAL UMM AD DAMI AND WADI RUM



Jabal Umm ad Dami is the highest mountain in Jordan and is located within the wider Wadi Rum desert landscape. This mountain area differs from the European examples because it belongs to an arid desert ecosystem. Its environmental value is linked to geological formations, desert biodiversity, water scarcity, native plants, and the ability of local communities to adapt to harsh climatic conditions.

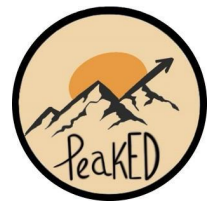
The Wadi Rum area is also connected with Bedouin culture. Mountains, valleys, and desert routes are part of a cultural landscape shaped by mobility, oral traditions, hospitality, knowledge of water sources, animal care, and adaptation to the desert environment. Tourism in this area is already important, but it needs to be managed in ways that protect fragile desert ecosystems and ensure that benefits remain within local communities. (UNESCO, n.d.; Ministry of Environment of Jordan, 2021).

Jordan's green growth policies identify tourism as a key sector for sustainable development. In the context of Wadi Rum and Jabal Umm ad Dami, this means reducing the environmental footprint of tourism, improving water and waste management, supporting eco-tourism, promoting local employment, and strengthening community-based enterprises.

A green strategy for this mountain-desert area should focus on low-impact tourism, Bedouin-led interpretation, protection of native vegetation, water-saving practices in camps, renewable energy use, and support for women's cooperatives. Traditional food, storytelling, desert guiding, and cultural hospitality can become central elements of sustainable tourism,

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as long as they are developed with respect for local communities and ecosystems. (Ministry of Environment of Jordan, 2021; UNWTO, 2021).

3. EXISTING GREEN STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR MOUNTAIN AREAS

Existing green strategies for mountain areas are based on integrated territorial development. This means that mountain regions are not treated as natural areas that need protection, or as tourism destinations that need promotion. Instead, they are understood as living territories where environmental sustainability, local livelihoods, culture, and governance should be addressed together.

At the European level, the Common Agricultural Policy plays an important role in mountain areas because it supports agricultural activity, sustainable land management, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural landscapes. Mountain farming is often less intensive than lowland agriculture, but it is essential for maintaining landscapes, preventing land abandonment, and supporting local food systems.

European strategies also connect mountain development with the Green Deal, climate adaptation, biodiversity protection, and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. These frameworks encourage regions to protect ecosystems, reduce climate risks, strengthen local value chains, and create opportunities for young people and small businesses.

For the Carpathians, the Carpathian Convention is one of the clearest examples of a dedicated mountain policy framework. It promotes the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian region, including biodiversity, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, and cooperation among countries.

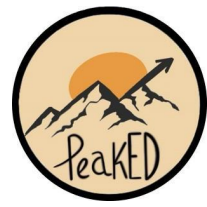
For Jordan, green strategies are connected with the Green Growth National Action Plan, which integrates climate change, sustainable development, and green growth objectives into key sectors, including tourism, agriculture, energy, transport, waste, and water. (European Commission, 2021; FAO, 2022).

For the Peaked project, these policies show that green strategies for mountain areas should not be limited to conservation. They should also support local entrepreneurship, youth participation, sustainable tourism, environmental education, local food systems, and community resilience. (European Commission, 2021; FAO, 2022; UNWTO, 2021).

4. POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR EUROPE'S AND NEIGHBORING MOUNTAIN AREAS

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Policies for Europe's and neighboring mountain areas share a common direction: they seek to protect fragile ecosystems while allowing mountain communities to remain economically and socially viable. Mountain policy should therefore address environmental vulnerability and territorial inequality.

In European mountain regions, policy priorities include biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture, rural development, forest protection, sustainable mobility, and tourism management. The EU approach recognises that mountain areas often face higher costs, difficult accessibility, and limited economic diversification. For this reason, support mechanisms are needed to maintain farming, local services, and community life.

In neighboring regions such as Jordan, the policy context is different, but the principles are similar. Green growth strategies focus on the sustainable use of scarce resources, especially water and energy, while also promoting tourism as a source of employment and local development. In arid mountain and desert areas, sustainability depends strongly on water conservation, waste management, and respect for local cultural systems.

Across both European and neighboring mountain areas, participatory governance is essential. Local communities, municipalities, protected area managers, tourism businesses, farmers, youth groups, and civil society organisations must be involved in designing and implementing green strategies. Without local participation, environmental policies risk becoming disconnected from the everyday realities of mountain communities. (FAO, 2022; UNWTO, 2021).

5. THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN VALUING NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

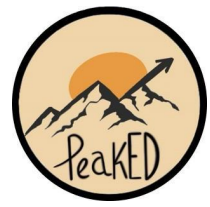
Tourism can play a major role in valuing the natural and spiritual heritage of mountains when it is planned responsibly. Mountains are often perceived as places of beauty, silence, spirituality, and identity. They are associated with myths, religious traditions, local stories, and collective memory. Sustainable tourism can help visitors understand these values and can generate income for communities that protect them.

UN Tourism highlights the role of mountain tourism in valuing natural and spiritual heritage, cultural diversity, and the traditional practices of mountain peoples. This is highly relevant for the PeakED project because each participating country offers a different expression of this relationship.

In Greece, Mount Olympus connects natural heritage with ancient mythology. In Bulgaria, the Rila Mountains connect biodiversity with Orthodox spirituality and monastic heritage. In Poland, the Carpathians connect mountain landscapes with highland identity and pastoral

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traditions. In Jordan, Wadi Rum and Jabal Umm ad Dami connect desert mountains with Bedouin knowledge, hospitality, and spiritual experience.

Tourism can support these values through guided interpretation, storytelling, cultural routes, local food experiences, environmental education, and community-based tourism. However, tourism can also damage mountain heritage if it becomes uncontrolled. For this reason, tourism should be managed through carrying capacity principles, visitor education, local ownership, and environmental standards. (UNESCO, n.d.; UN Tourism, 2023).

6. LINKS BETWEEN NATURE TOURISM, RURAL TOURISM, AND MOUNTAIN TOURISM

Nature tourism, rural tourism, and mountain tourism are interconnected. Mountain areas usually contain protected landscapes, rural communities, and cultural traditions in the same territory. A visitor who comes for hiking may also discover local food, traditional villages, crafts, religious sites, and agricultural landscapes.

Nature tourism focuses on biodiversity, landscapes, wildlife, forests, rivers, lakes, and geological formations. Rural tourism focuses on village life, agriculture, gastronomy, crafts, and local hospitality. Mountain tourism combines both, while also adding activities such as hiking, climbing, guiding, trail experiences, spiritual routes, and outdoor education.

For the PeakED project, this connection is important because it creates opportunities for green entrepreneurship. Young people can design tourism products that connect environmental protection with local culture and rural economies. For example, a sustainable itinerary could include a guided hike, a visit to a local producer, a traditional meal, a storytelling session, and an environmental awareness activity.

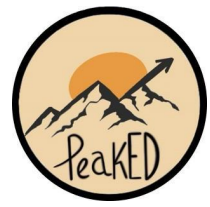
This integrated model helps distribute tourism benefits more widely. Instead of concentrating visitors only in famous locations, it encourages them to explore surrounding villages, local farms, and cultural sites. It can also reduce environmental pressure by diversifying visitor flows and extending the tourism season. (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2022; UN Tourism, 2023).

7. PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS AND ADDING VALUE TO LOCAL PRODUCTS

Sustainable food systems are central to the future of mountain areas. Mountain communities have developed food practices that are adapted to difficult environments,

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limited land, seasonal conditions, and local biodiversity. These food systems are not only economic activities; they are also part of cultural heritage.

In Greece, mountain products may include honey, herbs, dairy products, traditional pies, legumes, wine, and local recipes connected with village life. In Bulgaria, mountain herbs, dairy products, honey, and traditional foods can support rural tourism and local branding. In Poland, Carpathian food traditions, cheese-making, smoked products, and pastoral culture are important elements of regional identity. In Jordan, Bedouin food practices, traditional bread, coffee, herbs, and community meals can become part of sustainable tourism experiences.

Adding value to local products requires more than selling food. It requires storytelling, quality, branding, cooperation, and direct connection with visitors. Local producers can increase value when they explain where a product comes from, how it is produced, what tradition it represents, and how it supports the local environment. (European Commission, 2023).

Cooperatives and women-led initiatives are especially important. They can help small producers access markets, develop common branding, organise tasting experiences, and participate in tourism value chains. Tourism businesses can also support sustainable food systems by sourcing locally, reducing food waste, promoting seasonal menus, and presenting traditional recipes to visitors.

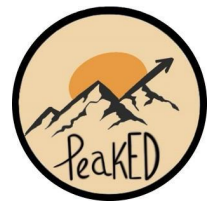
For PeakED, sustainable food systems can become a practical field for youth entrepreneurship. Young entrepreneurs can develop ideas such as local product maps, digital storytelling platforms, farm-to-table experiences, mountain food festivals, eco-labels, educational workshops, and tourism packages based on local gastronomy. (UN Tourism, 2024).

8. CONCLUSION

The mountain areas of Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, and Jordan show that green strategies should be place-based. Each mountain has its own ecosystem, cultural identity, tourism pressures, and development opportunities. Mount Olympus requires a strategy that connects biodiversity with mythology and responsible hiking. The Rila Mountains require a balance between protected ecosystems, spiritual heritage, and visitor management. The Polish Carpathians require transnational cooperation, rural resilience, and preservation of highland culture. Jabal Umm ad Dami and Wadi Rum require desert ecosystem protection, water-sensitive tourism, and Bedouin community empowerment.

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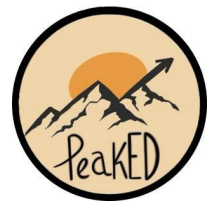
Across all these regions, sustainable mountain development depends on the same core principles: protecting nature, supporting local communities, valuing cultural and spiritual heritage, strengthening sustainable tourism, and promoting local food systems. Through the PeakED project, these principles can be translated into practical educational activities, Living Labs, and youth-led green entrepreneurship initiatives.

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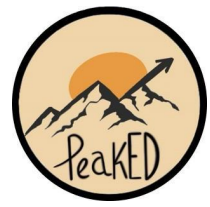
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