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I. Context

MRI Europe Objectives

The Mountain Research Initiative (MRI) Europe Program has been established in early 2007 as a regional science network within the larger framework of the global program of the MRI. The program aims at supporting and increasing high profile interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on global change in European mountains. Specifically, the regional program:

- addresses *key scientific players* and facilitates their interaction;
- generates *peer-reviewed papers* unpacking key global change science issues in mountains;
- develops *products* and content by the community and for the community of global change in mountain researchers; and
- develops inter- and transdisciplinary *research proposals* bringing together researchers working on global change in mountains.

Institutional Setting

The decline in overall funding from the Swiss Confederation threatened to terminate the successful MRI Europe by September 2008. During 2008 MRI successfully negotiated with the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Institut für Gebirgsforschung: Mensch & Umwelt (IGF) a collaborative agreement to continue MRI Europe with funding from Austria. Through a contract between the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Berne, MRI and IGF committed to long-term collaboration on MRI Europe with funding beginning in October 2008.

The position of the Program Manager, Dr. Astrid Bjørnsen Gurung, was financed through a working contract („Werkvertrag“) starting on October 1st 2008 and ending on March 31st 2009. University of Berne co-financed the position of Dr. Bjørnsen during this period. Thus office space and operational costs at the MRI Coordination Office in Berne are provided by the Institute of Geography at the University of Berne, Switzerland. The Program Manager participates in the monthly team meetings at the IGF and stays in regular contact with the Innsbruck colleagues through email, phone and Skype.

Although the official reporting period spans over six months only, the scientific relations between the IGF and the MRI Europe Program go back to 2007. The achievements of the European Program during the reporting period are seen as a continuation of activities. In the same vein, recent achievements and engagements will yield fruits benefiting European mountain science in a mid- and long-term perspective. For this reason, the report encloses relevant information from before the official reporting period and provides an outlook on the expected benefits and products for the Austrian and the European mountain research community.

II. Activities and Results

Activities undertaken by the MRI Europe Program to pursue the program's objectives (see Chapter I) can be classified in the following complementing groups:

- A. Advancing the Global Change Research Agenda;
- B. Influencing Research Funding; and
- C. Communication.

In 2008, MRI Europe was able to considerably expand its regional network with a new network for scientists working in the Carpathians. The program became very visible in the European Science landscape through active contributions to numerous international conferences. In terms of "Influencing Research Funding" the program initiated and supported several proposals to funding agencies, with the NET-Dynamo proposal to the European Science Foundation being recommended for funding in summer 2008. Finally, MRI solidified its relationships with other global change research and mountain programs, especially in the area of communications. For an overview, please consult Table 1.

A. Advancing the Global Change Research Agenda

Activities from 2007 until September 2008

In 2007 and 2008, the MRI Europe Program, which is now hosted by IGF, became a central actor in the coordination of global change research in Europe. For the MRI it was the flagship regional network, requiring the complete attention of MRI Scientific Program Manager Astrid Björnsen.

With Austrian and other colleagues, Dr. Björnsen was part of the steering committee of a major conference, **Managing Alpine Futures**, held in Innsbruck on 15-17 October 2007, organised by IGF (ÖAW), the University of Innsbruck and alpS. She chaired the session on Culture & Identity, edited the conference proceedings and compiled Conference Notes for the MRI Newsflash.

Immediately after the Managing Alpine Future Conference, Dr. Björnsen organized the third **MRI Networking Meeting** named "From the strategy to the project" with the support of the IGF, ÖAW, AlpS and Geography Innsbruck on 18-19 October 2007. The event focused on the integration of disciplines and yielded seven interdisciplinary working groups developing project proposals on mountain themes. One group dealing with conflicts in mountains continued the discussion in consecutive informal meetings in Innsbruck, Vienna, Brig and conducted a **workshop for proposal development** on 28 January 2009 at the IGF in Innsbruck. A summary on the networking meeting was published in Mountain Research and Development.

For the final conference of the Austrian **DIAMONT** (Data Infrastructure for the Alps Mountain Oriented Network Technology) project, the University of Innsbruck and the IGF invited Dr. Björnsen to moderate the panel on "Cultural differences and key issues of regional development" on 1 February 2008. Impressions of the conference have been summarized in Conference Notes for the MRI Newsflash.

Dr. Björnsen helped organize and attended the **COST Strategic Conference** on "Global Change and Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions" scheduled for 7-9 April 2008 in Innsbruck, Austria. The conference was organised by the IGF and the Federal Research and

Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape (BFW), Vienna. She attended the preparatory meeting at FAO Headquarters in Rome on 29 November 2007, prepared and attended the preceding press conference, organized and moderated the regional session on April 8, and prepared the webcast (see <http://mri.scnatweb.ch/media/webcasts/cost-strategic-workshop-global-change-and-sustainable-development-in-mountain-regions-7-9-april-08.html>).

On the background of the Carpathian Convention, Dr. Björnson was requested in early 2008 to support the process of building a science network in the Carpathian region. In the consecutive months, she compiled a “Who’s who” for the Carpathian region and took the lead in organizing a **launching workshop for the “Science for the Carpathians” (S4C) initiative** at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland in collaboration with the European Academy (Italy), Joanneum Research (Austria), Humboldt University (Germany), and University of Applied Science (Germany). The workshop was co-financed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), The Jagiellonian University and EURAC. It yielded in a synthesis paper on the current status of mountain research in the region and future priorities (submitted to Mountain Research and Development, February 2009) and a comprehensive workshop report (<http://mri.scnatweb.ch/events/mri-events/s4c-science-for-the-carpathians-27-28-may-2008-krakow-pl.html>).

The S4C workshop outcomes were communicated to the representatives of the **Ministerial Conference of Parties (COP) of the Carpathian Convention** at the 2nd meeting in Bucharest, Romania (17-19 June 2008). Dr. Björnson attended the conference and gave a presentation on the S4C initiatives and its institutional needs.

The MRI was one of the partners organizing the **first Swiss Conference on Mountain Research** (“Gebirgsforschung Schweiz 2008”), 9-12 September 2008 in Brig (<http://brig08.alpinestudies.ch/d/index.php>). Dr. Björnson organized and moderated the workshop on “Interdisciplinarity in mountain research: an analysis of the potentials and challenges based on case studies” co-chaired by Dr. Valerie Braun, IGF. The workshop results will be published in the conference proceedings and directly used for the Net-DYNAMO project (see Part B). The keynote presentations and the MRI workshop were recorded in a webcast (<http://mri.scnatweb.ch/media/webcasts/>).

Activities based on the Work Contract (Werkvertrag) with IGF

With the assistance of the International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps (ISCAR) and the Swiss Academy for Natural Science (Scnat), Dr. Björnson took a leading role in the institutionalization process of the S4C initiative, using ISCAR as a model for the Carpathian region. In the name of the MRI, the Swiss Academy proposed a side-event at the international conference on “The future of the Science Academies in the 21th century” (Podgorice, Montenegro, 10-12 Oct 2008) to discuss possible options for long-term funding of the S4C network with representatives of the science academies of eastern and southeastern European countries. The organizer welcomed the idea. Due to time constraints, the process was postponed to June 2009 (see Bratislava Meeting below).

In the interest of further developing the S4C network and activities, Dr. Björnson accepted the invitation to the **European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop** on “Europe’s Green Backbone – Post-socialist Land Use Change in the Carpathian Region” (EuCaRe), 9-10 October 2008 in Berlin.

The Director of the MRI Office, Dr. Greenwood, was invited to provide expert guidance in Copenhagen on 28-29 April 2008 to the Europe Environmental Agency's Mountain Assessment. As a continuation, Dr. Bjørnsen was invited to the “**European Ecosystem Assessment**” (EURECA) **Expert Meeting in Copenhagen** on 10-11 November 2008 to elaborate the assessment's framework. She will also attend the consecutive **meeting in Brussels** on 26 March 2009.

Both, Prof. Axel Borsdorf and Dr. Bjørnsen attended the **Mountain Partnership Secretariat Meeting** on „Improving Coordination in Mountain research Events and Activities“ on 4 December 2008 in Rome, Italy. Dr. Bjørnsen actively shaped the meeting agenda, moderated a part of the meeting (analysis) and assisted in the reporting.

Invited by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Bjørnsen will participate in the international conference on „**Identifying the research basis for Sustainable Development in the Mountain regions in Southeastern Europe**“ on 24-26 April 2009 in Borovets, Bulgaria, to set the first stone for the establishment of a new mountain science network for Southeastern Europe. She will actively contribute to the conference convening a session for the purpose of setting up a science network similar to S4C. To better integrate research results from Southeastern Europe, she will prepare a webcast of the conference.

On 9-10 June 2009, Dr. Bjørnsen will lead an MRI Europe meeting in **Bratislava**, Slovakia, to discuss efficient and sustainable approaches to secure long-term funding for an S4C coordination office within the Carpathian region with representatives of the National Academies of the Carpathian countries, research institutes and universities, with representatives of the ÖAW, the Swiss Academy of Sciences, and S4C Steering Committee Members. The meeting also aims at planning the first Forum Carpathicum scheduled for 15-17 September 2010 in Krakow, Poland. The invitation letter was signed by the presidents of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences.

Back-to-back with the S4C meeting, a scientific workshop is co-organized by the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and the ETH Zurich on Alpine and Carpathian research on ecosystem services. The science meeting should generate an international project proposal and strengthen collaboration between researchers active in these mountain ranges.

B. Influencing Research Funding

Proposals to funding agencies

On October 30 2007 MRI participants Drs. Martine Rebetez, Ulrike Tappeiner and Rüdiger Grote submitted the proposal, **Network for Integrated Assessment of the Dynamics of Mountain Catchments under Global Change (Net-DYNAMO)**, to the European Science Foundation. MRI staff Greenwood and Bjørnsen were major contributors to the proposal. This Research Network Programme would expand the capacity of European researchers to produce policy-relevant integrated assessments of socially-relevant variables under global change scenarios, yielding comparable outputs and promoting comparisons among catchments (100 to 10000 km²) that sample the diversity of European mountain environments. In June 2008, WSF informed Prof. Dr. Rebetez that Net-DYNAMO was recommended for funding. Dr. Bjørnsen organized and moderated a 1-day workshop on 24. October 2008 in Birmensdorf, Switzerland, to prepare for a possible launch in 2009.

In early 2008 Dr. Bjørnsen worked on a COST proposal on “**Forests and changing landscapes of the Carpathians**” submitted in April 2008. Based on the evaluation, it was further elaborated, renamed to “Future of Forests in Mountain Regions” (FOR MORE) and submitted in September 2008 by Jacek Kozak, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland.

Dr. Bjørnsen took over the responsibility for the development of the “**Mountain Observatories Network**” proposal to be submitted to the 6th Infrastructure Call of FP7 expected for Summer/Fall 2009 (deadline in 2010). She is in contact to the Environment, Climate Change and Bioenergy Division of the FAO, Rome, and the “Forschungsstelle für Gebirgsforschung”, Innsbruck, for further development of the proposal.

In late 2008, Dr. Bjørnsen contributed to the proposal „Mountain Sustainability: Transforming Research into Practice“ (**mountain.TRIP**) submitted by Prof. Borsdorf in early January 2009 as a coordination and support action to the FP7 Environment call 5.1.0.2 on Knowledge transfer and uptake of EU-research results.

She is part of the leading group developing a research proposal on „**Land us change related conflicts in mountain regions of Europe**“.

C. Communication

Website

The Swiss Academy continues to host MRI's website as an contribution to MRI's program. The link with the MRI's expert database necessitates the location of the MRI Europe website at its original server.

The website is maintained by Ms. Claudia Drexler (MRI Berne) while the content is managed by Dr. Bjørnsen. Links to the IGF Homepage have been installed and the institutional affiliation to the IGF highlighted. *Vice versa*, Dr. Bjørnsen's portrait on the IGF webpage contains a link to the MRI partner organization.

For MRI Europe: <http://mri.scnatweb.ch/networks/mri-europe/>

For S4C: <http://mri.scnatweb.ch/networks/mri-carpathians/>

Bjørnsen@MRI: <http://mri.scnatweb.ch/the-mri/team-/coordination-office-team.html>

Bjørnsen@IGF: <http://www.uibk.ac.at/igf/institut/team/bjoernsen/index.html.de>

On its website MRI provides webcasts and archives of selected workshops and conferences (e.g. COST Strategic Conference).

Electronic NewsFlash

The MRI Europe program publishes and distributes Newsflashes for Europe and S4C every second month. Past issues can be found at the website (for Europe: http://mri.scnatweb.ch/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=48&Itemid=43)

The newsflash provides a platform for the members of the regional networks and contains information on events, publications, calls, projects, etc.

MRI Experts Database

In February 2007, the MRI Europe Program began to expand systematically the database of European mountain researchers to create the document “Who is Who in European Mountain Research”. The same process started in April 2008 for the Carpathian region. As a result of the emerging sub-regional networks, the regional classification of MRI's datasets has been improved, as has the handling of regional mailings. The IGF benefits from the existing database as it facilitates the identification of specific interest groups (e.g. people interested in protected area research in the Alps).

Publications

During the reporting period, Dr. Björnson contributed texts, summaries and articles for the following publications:

- Managing Alpine Future Conference (English language editing)
- Ostapowicz Katarzyna, Sitko Izabela, eds. (2009). Science for the Carpathians: Strategy Development and Networking Workshop (Krakow, 27-28 May 2008). MRI Berne, 46 pp.
- Björnson Gurung, A. et al. (submitted). Global Change Research in the Carpathian Mountains. In: Mountain Research and Development.
- IGF Annual Report 2008
- MRI Annual Report 2008
- MRI Newsletter I, September 2008
- MRI Newsletter II, Spring 2009
- IGF Newsletter, January 2009
- Webcast Brig Conference, September 2008
- Proceedings Brig Conference, September 2008 (forthcoming)
- Webcast EUCARE Workshop, October 2008

III. Added Value for the Austrian Mountain Research Community

The most important benefit for the Austrian science community arises from the new institutional link between IGF of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the MRI Office in Berne. Through this partnership and shared interests, communication is facilitated and joint activities stimulated as exemplified by the numerous research proposals and collaborations in mountain events. Benefits arise also beyond the institutional boundaries of the IGF and the MRI as both institutions cultivate relations with global change research organizations, especially the Global Land Project, the IGBP and the IHDP through participation in events and joint publications.

Both, the MRI and the IGF cooperated closely with Swiss partners, ICAS and ISCAR, on events related to Swiss and Alpine mountain research. Both maintain communications and consultation with UN entities: UNESCO-MAB, the Mountain Partnership at the FAO, and the GEOSS at the WMO. Through the partnership of these effective networks, the Austrian science community becomes a node for European and global research related to Global Change in mountain regions.

Thus, the visibility of Austria in the international mountain research has been highlighted. Based on the cooperation of two important institutions in the mountain agenda the Austrian Academy of Sciences and its Research Unit IGF play an important role, not only in the Scientific Community, but also in leading positions of international networks.