



## **RESEARCH PROJECT**

# **“MOUNTAIN AREA SCHOOLS. CONDITION, PROBLEMS, PROSPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT”**

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National University  
(Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine)**

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## **1. ANNOTATION**

Life in thinly populated regions, in areas and houses considerably remote from schools, household peculiarities, landscape and natural features of the mountains, risks caused by floods, snowstorms, windstorms, lack of good roads, etc. not only contribute to forming highlanders' peculiar character and world outlook but also have a great impact on the functioning of mountain area schools.

Work with a teaching staff that is not numerous and often isolated, deprivation of everyday communication with colleagues, insufficient professional, political, social and economic awareness, and in many cases struggle for existence alongside with other factors lead to the rapid "aging" of teachers and to gradual reduction of their professional and social activity.

Most mountainous regions of the Ukrainian Carpathians are depressive in terms of the population employment and household monofunctionality, and are characterized by complicated demographic processes.

The quality of the population in mountain areas is rapidly lowering. The mountains inevitably affect children and pupils' life activity, mentality and world outlook.

In the XXI century it is necessary to increase information awareness, availability of scientific, technical, cultural sources and benefits of civilization for every child living in the mountain area. Due to modern information systems the realization of this task is becoming quite feasible.

## **2. THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

On the basis of the analysis of the social, economic and geoethnological conditions as well as the organizational and pedagogical peculiarities of the functioning of mountain area schools:

- to ascertain the specific character of teaching, bringing up and development of pupils in the highlands;
- to provide a scientific substantiation of the principles, content, forms and methods of work of mountain area schools;
- to work out a system of recommendations and measures to make their work more effective.

The primary objectives are:

- to improve the educational standards of schools in mountain areas, to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development by using new information technologies such as the Internet, on-line education;
- to study the geopsychic and geoethnological peculiarities of highlanders, their customs, traditions, rites and their impact on pupils' development and education;
- to orient pupils towards natural sciences, foreign languages; to engage them in acquiring skills in applied folk arts and crafts;
- to investigate the peculiarities of the content, the forms and methods of training teachers, educators, psychologists, social workers at universities for working in mountain area schools;
- to work out proposals for improving the work of mountain area schools especially in terms of revealing talents, orienting pupils towards taking natural sciences, foreign languages at an advanced level, acquiring skills in applied folk arts and crafts and

to present these proposals for consideration by central and local education authorities, heads of educational institutions;

– to conduct a comparative analysis of the scientific conceptions, approaches, findings and practical experience concerning the work of mountain area schools in Ukraine, in Europe and in the world; to join the efforts of European scientists and scientists all over the world to investigate the problems of mountain area schools. Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University could become such a unifying scientific centre.

### **3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Nowadays there are 697 secondary schools in Ivano-Frankivsk region, including 225 schools situated in mountain areas. Many mountain area schools are attended by a small number of pupils and have classes grouping pupils of different age, which complicates the teaching process and results in poor academic performance.

Now thousands of pupils and hundreds of teachers live in the mountains facing such problems as a severe and changeable climate, low temperatures, a low amount of oxygen in the air, worse soil, smaller areas of arable land, shorter vegetative periods, etc. All these factors inevitably cause the problems which never arise in lowland region schools, especially in towns and cities.

Slow social development of highland village communities greatly influences the working conditions in mountain area schools. In the mountains the contact of highlanders with wild nature has always been close. This cannot but affect the work of schools and pupils' development and education.

The unified standardized school system doesn't take into consideration either ethnological or geopsychological peculiarities of people's life.

As result there have arisen a number of problems which hinder the development of both schools and children. The problems are as follows:

1. The monofunctional development of highland villages makes it difficult for school-leavers to choose a profession and find employment.

2. The backwardness of highland villages, poor labor market, little interest of state and private organizations in the polyfunctional development of highland villages produce a negative effect on schools and their pupils.

3. The unsatisfactory sanitary conditions in most mountain area schools (it is cold in schools, and consequently the low quality of education process during 3-4 months in autumn and winter is observed).

4. Most teachers are not fully employed (from 6 to 10-15 lessons of the weekly workload).

5. Boarding schools do not function. Children have to cover 5-7 kilometres daily to get to school.

6. The school curricula lack flexibility. The working conditions of mountain area schools are ignored, which results in poor career counselling of the pupils and their bad preparation for higher education.

7. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that parents often migrate in search of seasonal work.

8. There are neither strategies for developing rural areas nor concrete plans of varying social and professional activities in mountain area schools. Lack of cooperation between village authorities and schools hampers the development of the latter.

#### **4. PROJECT IDEAS AND HYPOTHESES**

It is intended that the principles of school work in certain mountain areas will be determined, studied, analyzed and generalized.

Mountain communities though not advanced in terms of technologies have preserved their cultural wealth and rich original traditions which must be combined with innovative content, forms and methods of activity.

The researchers will try to go deeply into the real process of balancing of technological rationality and cultural wealth, which has not been lost yet, modern pragmatism and romanticism of mountain communities, coming enterprise and mountain-dwellers' love of nature.

The work of mountain area schools, natural development of the children, their education and upbringing take place in a special mental and ecological environment, which, due to rapid technological progress, has been lost by those who live in cities and industrial areas, with their alienation from nature, constant stresses, chronic fatigue and artificial environment.

Life values of mountain-dwellers, their mental health, optimism, cultural potential, their own system of life support under difficult geographical conditions – all these factors cannot but influence the outlook and world view of their children, the work of teachers and schools.

We theoretically assume that the research of the given problem will help to understand what the coming generations lose, what national, ethnic, life values are lost on the way to mass culture and high standards of consumption, which is not always justified and rationally organized.

The balancing of natural and ethnical elements on the one hand and progressive and innovative ones on the other hand with the help of modern information technologies which are available to the pupils of mountain area schools now and which will be made more available in future is the way of harmless intertwining of natural elements with scientific, technological and social progress. We can witness harmonious mutual enrichment of education, science, culture due to sound life potential of mountain-dwellers, and at the same time their development, successful activity and prosperity owing to scientific and social progress.

It is necessary that school, education and science should be involved in the development of the Carpathian region. Mountain areas should be provided with achievements of modern science and high technologies, and not destroyed by powerful industry which is sure to upset social, natural and ecological balance.

#### **5. PROJECT EXPECTED RESULTS, THEIR CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE WORLD STANDARDS**

We expect the following results:

- publication of the monograph “Mountain Area Schools in Ukraine (Their Condition, Problems, Development Prospects)”;
- preparing scientific recommendations and suggestions for the state administration of education and institutions of local governing concerning the problem of further development of mountain area schools, including recommendations on introduction of modern information technologies into the process of education;

- creation of specialized schools of a new type in mountain areas:
  - natural science schools and schools with extensive learning of foreign languages;
  - comprehensive health-improving schools;
  - art schools;
  - sport schools etc.
- professional guidance to the teachers of mountain area schools (publication of textbooks, conducting workshops, “Round Tables”, organization of creative teamwork groups of teachers, etc.);
- looking for gifted and talented children in mountain areas and creating a program me of their further development;
- organization of local and international exchange programmers, symposia, seminars and workshops on the problems of mountain area school development, improvement of educational process, pupils’ education and development;
- creation of “International Association of Mountain Area Schools” involving countries of Carpathian, Alpine, Balkan and other mountain regions of Europe;
- launching the periodical “The Mountain Area School” as the organ of this association.

The research results will correspond to the world standards.

The UNO “Programme of Stable Development of Mountain Regions”, the Krakow conference of 1998 “The Green Mountain Range of Central and Eastern Europe”, the Carpathian Convention (Framework Convention on Protection and Stable Development of the Carpathians, Kyiv – 2003) signed at the Fifth Conference “Environment for Europe” state that one of the countries’ obligations is to care for constant development and protection of the Carpathians.

The documents mentioned above and the materials of the UNO Conference, which took place in Rio de Janeiro in June, 1992, emphasize the importance of functioning of human civilization, social originality of mountain-dwellers.

Social life and nature, education and economy affect one another, their interrelation is one of the aspects of the present research. Thus, the problem of education in mountain area schools is not exclusively Ukrainian, it is of interest for other countries of Europe and of the world.

## **6. APPLICATION OF THE RESULTS**

The research results will be and are already applied in several spheres: training teachers for mountain area schools; recommendations and instructions for the professional orientation of the work in mountain area schools; promotion of our ideas, findings and services to the markets of the countries having mountain area schools and interested in the issue.

The problem analysis has direct connection with the teaching and educational process conducted by the Department of Theory and Methods of Primary Education.

The teacher training for the work in mountain area schools has its difficulties and specificity. The schools attended by a small number of pupils, classes grouping pupils of different age, limited professional communication (two or three teachers per school), hard living and working conditions, etc. – all these things are necessarily taken into account in the professional and psychological training of teachers.

To provide better understanding of the working conditions in the mountains the students are taught the following courses: “Mountain Area School. Peculiarities and Problems”, “Mountain-Dwellers: Psychology, Traditions, Customs”, “Mountain-Dwellers’ National Pedagogical Traditions”.

The mountain area school problems are duly represented in the topics of the course and diploma papers and master theses.

Aiming at better training of the would-be teachers for their work in the mountains the Department arranges various kinds of practical activities – familiarizing, land-geographical, physical-geographical, folklore, teaching-educational and practical training.

The students’ research efforts are directed mainly at the investigation of various aspects of the young mountain-dwellers’ development and their education; while writing diploma papers and master theses students who finished mountain area schools and live in the mountainous regions are given different ethnological tasks and they usually devote their papers to the problems of the mountain area school functioning, mountain-dwellers’ national pedagogical traditions, etc.

The second field of the application of the results will be working out recommendations and programmers’ for teachers, schoolmasters and local education bodies concerning specialization of schools and work with gifted and talented children; pedagogical orientation of school-leavers and their consequent selection; propagating post-graduate studies, etc.

The third direction presupposes spreading our materials at the markets of other countries. These materials may include: scientific-methodic help to mountain area school teachers; on-line education; the use of mountain-dwellers’ customs and traditions for more successful development of children; school orientation towards the profound study of the subjects of the natural-scientific and physical-mathematical cycles and foreign languages.

The ways of solving these problems will be in great demand at the markets of ideas and services of other countries.

## **7. THE AUTHORS’ BASIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT RESEARCH AREA, THE MAIN PUBLICATIONS OVER THE PERIOD OF THE LAST 3 YEARS**

The research into of the problem of the mountain area school is based on some preparatory work.

The authors of the project have worked out “The Cooperation Agreement Between Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University and Verkhovyna District State Administration”, Rector of the University, and Head of the District State Administration (DSA), on November 11, 2006.

One of the main points of the agreement is research on further development of mountain area schools. The authors of the project organized and conducted a “Round Table” on the issue attended by the officers of DSA Education Department, school principals and teachers.

The project “Would-Be Teacher School” is launched in Verkhovyna district. Within the project school Olympiads and competitions aimed at finding talented pupils are held.

Prospective young teachers are encouraged to conduct independent research work seeking for MA or Candidate degrees. The basic achievements of the team working on this project are presented in the following publications:

1. The Concept of Self-Respect in the Hutsul Mentality. – Ivano-Frankivsk.
2. Values of the Ukrainian National Character. – 2005.
3. The Conflict in the Hutsul Mentality. – Article. – Chernivtsi.
4. The Concept of Human Dignity in the Hutsul Mentality. – Kyiv-Lutsk.
5. Methods of Studying Psychological Aspects of Students' Ethnic Identity and National Self-Respect. – Article. – Ivano-Frankivsk.

## **8. STAGES OF RESEARCH**

### **Stage One – Organization and Planning**

Contents:

- specifying the research conception;
- defining research directions;
- choosing objects of research;
- forming a research group;
- working out a calendar work plan.

Stage duration: January – May 2006.

Expected results and documentation: Plan of the problem research "Mountain Area Schools. Condition, Problems, Prospects of Development".

### **Stage Two – Stating Research**

Contents:

- investigating the state of social and economic development of settlements (towns, small towns and villages) with the official status of 'the mountain area' (their main activities, migration processes, etc.);
- analysis of the network of schools in the areas with the official status of 'the mountain area';
- contingent of pupils of mountain area schools. In particular children going to schools with a small number of pupils and classes grouping pupils of different age (accomplishment of general compulsory education);
- quantitative and qualitative analysis of the teaching staff of mountain area schools (staff sufficiency, fluctuation);
- libraries, cultural, educational and medical establishments in settlements with the official status of 'the mountain area' (funds, state, activity, staff);
- availability, material state and functioning of boarding schools, dormitories and other places for children from remote settlements. Quantitative and qualitative complement of educators, schoolchildren;
- organization of catering, medical assistance and transportation services for children in mountain area schools;
- sanitary and hygienic conditions in mountain area schools;
- mountain area schoolchildren's state of health. Typical diseases;
- surveys, questionnaires, study of official statistics.

Stage duration: January – December, 2021.

Expected results and reporting documentation: collecting statistic and real data; statistic tables, descriptive materials, references, minutes, reports, etc.

### **Stage Three – Analytic Research**

Contents:



- analysis of collected material and research of objective and subjective reasons for difficulties hampering the development of mountain area schools.

Stage duration: 2007- 2021.

Expected results and documentation: summaries and conclusions, analytic reports and analytic materials for state educational bodies and local self-governing institutions.

#### **Stage Four – Creative Research**

Contents:

- working out and specifying the research hypothesis;
- preparation and argumentation of recommendations;
- putting the research group’s ideas into practice;
- analysis of positive results and hindrances to the development of mountain area schools in accordance with the plan of the project;
- analytical-theoretical and practical activities.

Stage duration: 2008 – 2022

Expected results and documentation:

- scholastic materials and practical recommendations;
- holding the international scientific conference “Mountain Area Schools. Prospects of Development” (2023);
- organization of “International Association of Mountain Area Schools” (2023);
- launching the periodical “The Mountain Area School” (2023).

#### **Stage Five – Summarizing.**

Contents:

- summing up the research results;
- maintaining the work of the Association and the periodical “The Mountain Area School”;
- preparation of the monograph “Mountain Area Schools in Ukraine”.

Stage duration: 2014 – 2026.

Expected results and documentation:

- the monograph “Mountain Area Schools in Ukraine” (2021, 2022).