

Mountain research in Europe

By M.F.Price, Man and the Biosphere Series, Volume 14, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Paris, 1995, pp. 230, UNESCO ISBN 92-3-103050-7.

R. ŠOLTĚS

*Research Coordination Centre of the Tatra National Park,
059 60 Tatranská Lomnica, Slovak Republik*

The author is mainly known for his books on environmental subjects such as *Humankind in the biosphere* (1990), *Mountain forests as common-property resources* (1990) and others.

The introductory chapter explains the history of this book. It dates back to 1972 when UNESCO initiated a programme involving the inter-relationships between human activities and the biosphere. One of fourteen, the MAB Project 6 was entitled: *The impact of human activities on mountain ecosystems*. The focus of mountain ecosystems for environmental research provides an excellent framework for those wishing to learn more about mountain research in Europe.

This book presents an overview of scientific activities on mountain systems undertaken within the framework of MAB. It is divided into three parts. Part I considers MAB 6 projects in western Europe; Part II describes MAB 6 project activities in the mountains of eastern and central Europe and the former USSR; Part III draws the previous chapters together, examining institutional, organizational and scientific issues.

The longest chapters of the book are I and II. These cover specific applications of research to the mountain ecosystems and give examples of how research projects are managed. In each of the countries considered in the review, the following 3 sections are discussed: (1) Mountain regions, (2) organization of MAB-6 activities and (3) MAB-6 research activities including description of individual projects. The history of mountain research and its results are critically evaluated. Sometimes it became vital to identify problem areas and determine research priorities. A particular effort has been made to introduce cases when work continued on the integration of its results using geographic information systems. An example of this is project Grossglockner, Austria, where the MAB-6 maps have been integrated with remote-sensing imagery from satellites and aerial photographs, and maps

from the 1930s to 1950s, in order to create an historical perspective. Fairly informative illustrations and charts make the book easy to understand and interesting. Every chapter ends in conclusions providing overall information on research carried out, with special emphasis on the interdisciplinary approach of MAB. Since the MAB National Committees of eastern countries are often defunct, or the MAB-6 activities were limited (being conducted by small groups of scientists), the author gives information on how these problems were addressed, and the future relevance of mountain activities in these countries. There are some confusions in the text, for example integrated research in the High Tatras is not planned for four representative watersheds but for four representative catchments. But this small mistake does not detract from the value of the book.

The range of the research activities presented in chapters 1 and 2 may be compared to the great environmental and cultural diversity of the mountain regions in which they were undertaken. The concluding chapter compares these diverse activities and deals with such topics as models in MAB-6 projects, and organizational and institutional issues. The importance of considering interdisciplinary research is stressed and related to the mountain ecosystems. The last chapter is dedicated to the legacy for the future.

One could argue that results of the scientific activities should have been presented in more details. The list of references is not as comprehensive as possible, but the presentation of scientific results is not the aim of this book and it would have increased the content to unmanageable size.

In conclusion, the book is a vital work for everybody who is involved in mountain research. As the book is written in a popular style it is also intelligible to anybody who is interested in the mountain environment on an amateur level.

Received 13 February 1996;
accepted 29 April 1996.