

# Mountain research and development: past, present and future

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*Reflections on the leading scholarly journal focusing on mountain research.*

The quarterly journal *Mountain Research and Development* first appeared in 1981, although the seeds for creation of a mountain journal were sown in 1974 during the Munich Conference on Development of Mountain Environment. With the inclusion of Chapter 13, Managing fragile ecosystems: sustainable mountain development, into Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED - Earth Summit) at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the current progress in the journal's transformation to meet newly arising opportunities, it is timely to document its origins and evolution.

## HISTORY

During the Munich Conference in 1974, which was sponsored by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) with the cooperation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) -Project 6, Study of the impact of human activities on mountain ecosystems, discussion arose over the need to establish an international applied mountain research organization,<sup>1</sup> and an associated scholarly journal. Dr Klaus Lampe of GTZ took me aside and gave me DM 100. His opinion was that such a journal would be too academic and, if I really wanted to initiate one, I should collect 1 000 such sums on an annual basis and simply do it! The DM 100 remained in my wallet for six years while I continued to edit *Arctic and Alpine Research* until 1980.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) was eventually founded in 1982.

<sup>2</sup> The author founded *Arctic and Alpine Research* in 1969 at the Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research, University of Colorado, USA.

The second, and decisive, step was tied to the appointment of Professor Walter Manshard as Vice Rector of the United Nations University (UNU) in 1977, and his recruitment of me as coordinator of the project Highland-Lowland Interactive Systems. My work with UNU took me to the mountains northwest of Chiang Mai, Thailand and to reconnoitre field sites in the Himalaya for a proposed project on mountain hazards mapping - a Boulder, Colorado-Bern, Switzerland collaborative endeavour.

The proceedings of the first UNU-Chiang Mai conference (Ives, Sabhasri and Voraurai, 1980) took more than two years to edit and publish. Dusting off my idea for a journal, I proposed to Professor Manshard that if he could ensure a US\$20 000 annual subsidy, I would produce a journal that would guarantee regular and rapid publication of the proceedings of the second Chiang Mai conference (Chapman and Sabhasri, 1983), as well as the research results that we confidently expected from the Himalayan mountain hazards mapping project, and from other rapidly forming endeavours. It would also cost less than half that of publication within the United Nations system.

Thus, the deal was struck. This was the time to retrieve Dr Lampe's DM 100 from my wallet and to seek, not necessarily 1 000 more subscriptions in view of the confirmed UNU annual subsidy of US\$18 000, but certainly 500. I also needed rapid input from many colleagues and, equally urgently, I needed editorial assistance. Pauline Ives, I believe, always somewhat anxious at the thought of her husband falling over his own optimism, after some arm-twisting, agreed to assist: "but only for three years, or so...". This became seventeen! [*Ed note: Pauline Ives is guest editor of this issue of Unasyva.*]

To provide an institutional framework for the proposed new journal, the International Mountain Society (IMS) was registered in the State of Colorado as a non-profit corporation in September 1980. The journal was to be published jointly by IMS and UNU. A final risk-reducing step was a contract with UNESCO whereby four special issues of the new journal would be produced on the state of knowledge of the Andes.

A letter-writing campaign produced most of the target of 500 subscriptions, and the first issue of *Mountain Research and Development* appeared in May 1981.

### **EDITORIAL POLICY**

In the opening editorial that I prepared for Volume 1, 1981, I wrote:

"... For almost a decade there has been a slow but sure marshalling of concern over developments in mountain regions. Following the now famous Stockholm Conference on Environment, several United Nations agencies, bilateral aid organizations, private foundations, institutions, and individuals, have drawn attention to the worldwide threat of runaway population growth, to unorganized use, even abuse, of renewable natural resources, and to the actual and potential impact of mountain mismanagement."

There followed a claim that there is the urgent need for developing fuller appreciation of the mountain environment and its peoples and for joining together all who depend on mountains for their livelihood, recreation or scientific stimulation; in short, all who derived substance, material or spiritual, from the high places of the world.

It was recognized that our editorial concern would "often lie as much with problems facing upland people as with their physical environment". The broader aim was "to influence mountain management by urging, and providing, a sound scientific base for decision-making... to strive for a better balance between mountain environment, development of resources and the well-being of mountain peoples".

This led to the intention to produce a journal containing papers that were both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, that endorsed neither a conservationist nor a resource development viewpoint, but followed a middle-of-the-road pragmatism.

For 18 years the editorial policy has endorsed the view that the dissemination of the results of both scholarly and applied research would necessarily have a beneficial effect. Special editorial support has been provided to intending authors whose first language was other than English and/or whose local, or country, facilities caused them particular difficulty in preparing manuscripts for submission to a main-line English-language publication. We have also continued to believe that high quality in appearance, relatively expensive paper and careful attention to attractively reproduced photographs justify the financial outlay entailed.

### **CONTENT OF THE JOURNAL**

Between 1981 and 1997 more than 550 articles (17 volumes containing 32 to 36 articles in each) were published on areas ranging from Greenland to Patagonia, including lesser recognized mountain lands, such as Cape Verde, the Canary Islands, Israel, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. However, it is not surprising that the Himalaya-Hindu Kush and the Andes were the focus of the majority of contributions (see Table).

#### **Regional breakdown of articles published in *Mountain Research and Development*, 1981-97**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of articles</b>
Himalaya-Hindu Kush	186
Andes and Central America	93
Europe	60
Africa	58
Canada and United States	40
Southeast Asia	29
Papua New Guinea	19
Other areas	21
General/overall significance	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>552</b>

A number of special issues of the journal have been produced, beginning with the four "state-of-knowledge" reports on Andean ecosystems. Many have regional coverage:

- African mountains and highlands
- Highlands of northern Thailand
- Spanish Pyrenees
- Frost and drought in Papua New Guinea
- Polish Tatra Mountains
- Managing fragile ecosystems in the Andes
- The Himalaya-Ganges problem

Other special issues comprise papers presented at a conference with a thematic focus:

- Stability and instability of mountain ecosystems
- Mountain cartography
- The transformation of mountain environments

The journal's editorial policy has been accredited as vital to the inclusion of Chapter 13 in Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit). The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) has described *Mountain Research and Development* as integral to the Rio+5 follow-up. Certainly, the accumulation of 18 years of editorial experience and the sustained record of publication, participation in mountain field research, training exercises and conferences all had a major impact on our ability to publish *Mountains of the world: a global priority* (Messerli and Ives, 1997) and in record time for its presentation to UNCSD and the UN Special General Assembly of June 1997.

### **CHALLENGES OF SURVIVAL AS AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL**

It became apparent in the early 1980s that the financial base of the journal was inadequate and that exceptional measures would be required to achieve continuity. While the number of subscriptions increased steadily through the 1980s, the initial UNU annual subsidy of US\$18 000 was reduced to US\$14 000 and took the form of "gift" subscriptions to institutions and individuals in developing countries or countries with currency restrictions. By 1997 the UNU subsidy was US\$7 000 short of the "face value" of the actual subscriptions granted, a reflection of increasing costs of materials and production.

The "editorial office" also handled distribution - and spent weekends and evenings stuffing and addressing envelopes, carrying mail sacks to the Boulder, Colorado post office and banking individual subscriptions.

When I accepted a faculty appointment with University of California, Davis in 1989, the journal moved to Davis and we negotiated a contract with University of California Press (Berkeley) to be our new publisher. This reduced the editors' workload enormously with regard to distribution and collection of subscriptions, but increased the production costs correspondingly. The anticipated financial shortfall from this arrangement was more than offset by a generous one-time grant of US\$200 000 (1990-93) from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).

### **THE PRESENT**

I retired from my faculty position with the University of California in 1997, and returned to my adopted country and "home town" of Ottawa. I received much appreciated assistance from the Department of Geography, Carleton University, where I now hold the position of Honorary Research Professor. Pauline's retirement as co-editor at the end of 1997 brought on a long realized need for serious consideration about the future of the journal (the difference between the "salary" Pauline had drawn and the cost of hiring a new editor at current rates would have been between a factor of two and three). The immediate financial crisis was stemmed by a grant of US\$53 000 from UNU, to allow time for preparation of long-term plans for the future and, fortunately, while the financial assets of the journal were moving close to a red line, worldwide interest in its longevity came alive.

### **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

The future of the journal was placed on the agenda of a meeting of the Interim Facilitating Committee of the Mountain Forum, held in Kathmandu in November 1997. This produced strong recommendations for the creation of a *Mountain Research and Development* Transition Committee with a mandate to review the current status of the journal and to provide a detailed outline for its future. With generous support from SDC, 12 representatives from five continents met for four

days in Interlaken, Switzerland, in February 1998. A report was prepared for approval by the Mountain Forum and for submission for possible substantial funding to SDC and other appropriate institutions. While this process is still under way, it is well advanced and I believe that there is room for considerable optimism.

### **Editorial policy**

Recognizing the accelerating growth in mountain awareness since 1992, the transition committee recommended expansion of the journal coverage to include a major new section on development issues. This would embrace: policy analysis; opinion pieces; articles focusing on practical aspects; discussion of ongoing and completed development projects; and willingness to grapple with sensitive political and socio-economic issues (for example, drug production in mountain areas, and highland-lowland migration) as they affect mountain peoples. This new section would complement the existing one on scholarly research, which would be maintained and strengthened. Prospects for regional editions in languages other than English will be explored.

### **Management**

The report of the Transition Committee recommends the establishment of a revolving editorial advisory board, with a full-time managing editor based at the Geographical Institute, University of Bern. An editor-in-chief will be appointed to serve as chair of the editorial board, and guest editors invited to take responsibility for individual issues dealing with topics close to their special competence or regional affiliation. Editorial activities will be closely interlinked with the regional nodes of the Mountain Forum and other appropriate international mountain centres. Copyright would remain with UNU and IMS.

### **Financial basis**

UNU would substantially increase the level of its current contribution; significant funding over a five-year period would be provided by SDC; other institutions and agencies, including ICIMOD, FAO and UNESCO, would be encouraged to make modest annual contributions. Much of this anticipated funding would ensure subsidized distribution to individuals and institutions in developing countries. The broadened editorial focus would, it is hoped, attract a wide audience and hence, radically increase the total circulation and the financial base.

### **CONCLUSION**

Looking back over the 18 years of the journal's existence I am beset by a number of strong emotions. The journey has been a roller-coaster from euphoria to fear of collapse: a surge of achievement to a frustration over forced attention to detail. *Mountain Research and Development* has introduced us to many new friends and colleagues, and reinforced contacts with existing ones all over the world, with remarkably few embittered feelings (although about half the papers submitted have been rejected, we have always tried to provide disappointed authors with advice and encouragement). I have also constantly been amazed at how the vast majority of our manuscript reviewers extended themselves to assist submitting authors; negative criticism, the curse of much of academia, has been a rarity. In brief, it has been an 18-year inspiration for my sense of *mountains*. In terms of the future, I am confident that the *Mountain Research and Development* of the new millennium will reach further heights as it passes beyond my grateful hands.

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