

Donne in salita or "Women on the climb"

Beth Schommer

Ev-K²-CNR Project

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beth.schommer@montagna.org

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This workshop, dedicated to the women of Italy's mountain areas, was surely one of the most popular the first day of the Mountain "States-General", held in Turin, Italy from September 27-29, 2001. "Donne in Salita", which saw around 70 participants including representatives of local administrations, is the first in a series of initiatives which will focus on mountain women organized and promoted by the Italian Committee for 2002 IYM. The objectives of this workshop were the same as those adopted by the international organizations involved in promoting the Global Mountain Women's Agenda during the International Year of Mountains (IYM):

1. Give mountain women a platform to articulate their concerns and share experiences and ideas related to the future of mountain livelihoods and cultures, using the IYM as a vehicle
2. Collect, present and disseminate state-of-knowledge regarding mountain women's situation
3. Create new coalitions, networks and partnerships around mountain women to influence policies and issues
4. Increase interaction between policy makers, entrepreneurs, media, civil society organizations and mountain women
5. Improve and increase media's coverage of mountain women

Vice President of the National Union of Mountain Communities, Municipalities and Institutions (UNCME), Valerio Prignacchi, opened the session, reconfirming the attention that his organization, made up of local administrations representing 4,200 mountain municipalities, intends to place on women's issues throughout 2002.

Manuela di Centa, famous Italian cross-country skier, Olympic gold-medalist and testimonial of the Italian Committee for 2002 IYM moderated the workshop presentations, including those of:

Michela Zucca, anthropologist of the Centre of Alpine Ecology, Trento;

Annalisa Cogo, President of the Italian Society of Mountain Medicine and member of the CAI (Italian Alpine Club) Medical Commission;

Maria Cristina Ronc, Archeologist of the Aosta Valley Regional Archaeological Museum and President of the Aosta Valley Section of Zonta Club International

Paola Ortensi, President of the association "Donne in Campo" of the Italian Confederation of Agriculturists, as well as a series of "personal-experience testimonials" made by invited mountain women professionals and entrepreneurs.

Some particularly urgent themes Italy's mountain women will need to address throughout IYM and beyond can be summed up in the following presentation extracts:

Michela Zucca discussed the growing problem of mountain depopulation, citing the difficulties faced by women in mountain areas, such as disruption of traditional social structures and reduction of public services, as one of the main causes. Dr. Zucca went on to highlight the positive outputs and opportunities by and for women in the mountains: for example, women statistically seem to be more apt than their male counterparts to engage in entrepreneurial activities, despite the relative absence of professional stability and need to dedicate a large part of personal free time to work activities. Such efforts in fact need to be reinforced and supported institutionally, both with facilities and funding to ensure continuation of this positive trend and help stem the migratory patterns currently leaving mountainous areas faced with the threat of abandonment. The Centro di Ecologia Alpina (Centre of Alpine Ecology) has committed to continuing to strengthen its focus on this issue during 2002 - IYM through promotion of mountain women's culture, by creating links between working women in the Alps and other mountainous regions of Italy and Europe as well as by facilitating an exchange of experiences and information on how to benefit from available funds and entrepreneurial development initiatives.

Annalisa Cogo emphasized the additional need to guarantee adequate health care facilities and services for mountain populations, and mountain women in particular, where territorial characteristics combined with demographic phenomenon have formed enormous obstacles over recent decades. Major short-term objectives should be improvement and diffusion of a more efficient emergency service, including heli-ambulance/helicopter rescue services, development of tele-medicine initiatives and dissemination of information for health care providers as well as for the public. To reach these goals the collaboration of the Ministry of Health as well as of local government bodies (Regions, Provinces, etc.) and specialized organizations such as the CAI Medical Commission, the Italian Mountain Medicine Society and INRM (National Institute of Mountain Research) will be sought.

Paola Ortensi also reaffirmed that there are more and more mountain women engaging in entrepreneurial activities such as organizing increasingly popular farm-holidays (agrotourism), small-scale cheese manufacturing, etc. Thanks to their enthusiasm and their desire to succeed, women can be credited with keeping mountain society full of life and work opportunities. In order to improve living and working conditions in mountain areas, however, Paola Ortensi suggests that the new revision of the Italian Mountain Law (94/97) include incentives and other positive actions, not only for women. It is essential that the enormous variety of possible contributions that men and women, the true protagonists of mountain life, can provide be highlighted during (and beyond) 2002 IYM. It is in fact important to remember that 2002 has been chosen as the Year of "Mountains" (and not "the Mountain"), thus emphasizing the need to respect the diversity and numerous realities that mountains present.

Maria Cristina Ronc addressed the relevance of culture as an important resource for mountain women's practical and spiritual life, pointing out the regrettable absence of an observatory similar to that of Trentino in her valley, the Valle d'Aosta. Dr. Ronc went on to illustrate regional statistics regarding female school-attendance, career choices and the presence of women with college-level education in the workforce. The resulting figures show a substantial percentage of women in managerial positions in the Aosta Valley (36.46% of the total), while women tend to dominate the traditionally "cultural" occupational sectors in the Region: museums, theaters, etc. Apart from the field of construction, where they are totally absent, women are equally present in all professional areas. Furthermore, there is a growing need to thoroughly analyze the trend regarding the development of overlapping or combined work activities, mainly between tourism and agriculture.

Notes to readers

The author may be reached at:

Beth Schommer
Executive Director
Ev-K²-CNR Project
Via S. Bernardino, 145
24126 Bergamo
Italy.
Tel: ++39/035/3230525
Fax: ++39/035/3230541
<http://www.montagna.org>

Beth Schommer was the International Relations Coordinator, Italian Committee for 2002 - IYM.