Social learning tools for mountain communities’ resilience building: Reflecting on their potential integration in higher education for sustainable mountain development

Social learning tools that facilitate a process of knowledge co-production among diverse actors have proved useful to support resilience building and adaptation planning in highly vulnerable mountain areas. Can such tools be integrated in higher education to foster students’ capacities to contribute to more sustainable development pathways in mountains?

“PLI” Module in Masters’ Curriculum:
In collaboration with the center AGRUCO of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the social learning tool “Promoting Local Innovations” was integrated into an interdisciplinary Master’s program on “Agroecology, Culture and Sustainable Endogenous Development” between 2007 and 2009.

Learning Outcomes:
Masters students…
• … are able to explain mountain communities’ context and dynamics from an interdisciplinary perspective (systems knowledge)
• … perceive local stakeholders’ perceptions and contribute with them to developing visions for the future (target knowledge)
• … apply participatory planning tools and facilitation skills (transformation knowledge)

Challenges and Opportunities:
• Participants achieve multiple learning outcomes in a relatively short time
• The training module also contributes to local development initiatives
• It requires important preparation and collaboration with local partners
• Intensive course that requires highly skilled facilitators

Promoting Local Innovations (PLI):
• PLI is a tool that aims at promoting local innovations and sustainable development, while developing social learning skills among the participants.
• 6-day workshop carried out in the context of a rural community;
• 20-30 participants including students, community members, traditional authorities, government representatives, rural extensionists, and NGOs;
• Interactive pedagogy and peer-to-peer learning
• On-the-job training in social learning facilitation skills

Community-based social learning modules can lead to significant learning outcomes in higher education for sustainable mountain development.

References and Further Reading: