

MARGISTAR Perspective on Green Deal Diplomacy for Mountain Revitalisation

Bridging Policy and Territory: Green
Deal Diplomacy in European
Mountain Regions

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Bridging Policy and Territory: Green Deal Diplomacy in European Mountain Regions

Over the past four years, the MARGISTAR has explored a critical question: *how do we ensure that far-reaching European policies translate into fair and sustainable realities for rural and mountainous areas?* Within the framework of European policies such as the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas (2040), we identified tensions between European policy objectives and the diverse conditions, priorities, and capacities of rural and mountain regions.

To address this, within MARGISTAR, we developed an understanding of Green Deal Diplomacy. Far from being a rigid theoretical framework, we conceptualize it as a dynamic approach to dialogue and negotiation across territorial governance levels, connecting European policy objectives with the social, ecological, and economic realities of rural and mountain areas. Conceived as a collaborative space for interaction, negotiation, and dialogue where diverse actors and forms of knowledge intersect to align EU ambitions with the everyday realities of mountain communities, it brings public authorities, researchers, and mountain actors together to interpret evidence, negotiate trade-offs, and identify locally appropriate responses.

Navigating Geopolitical Tensions: The Pinching Approach

To translate this diplomacy into practice, MARGISTAR developed the “Pinching Policymakers” approach as a new science-policy interface (Sarkki et al., submitted). Driven by a strong commitment to spatial justice and environmental integrity, the approach connects to the core of Green Deal Diplomacy through a transparent normative purpose to identify and initiate policy changes at European and national levels, ensuring mountainous regions are not left behind in the face of grand challenges, such as climate change and social equality.

This is particularly crucial today, as Europe confronts strategic challenges of a new dimension. Heightened geopolitical tensions have shifted priorities toward economic competitiveness and resource security, particularly regarding energy and raw materials, raising questions about how these priorities interact with environmental protection and territorial cohesion. In this context, a key short-term policy challenge has emerged: *how to sustain the ecological and social Green Deal objectives in turbulent times without compromising environmental standards in a rush for resources?* Policy pinches draw decision-makers’ attention to tensions between short-term strategic priorities and longer-term commitments to territorial cohesion and biodiversity.

REGULANDIA: Simulating Real Science-Policy Dialogue

To move from theory to action, explore tensions, and build capacities for Green Deal Diplomacy, MARGISTAR developed REGULANDIA, a science-policy simulation. We envisioned it as an interactive simulation game where participants take on assigned roles and explore different

responses within a structured scenario. Drawing on established methodologies, the tool is an adapted version of the science-policy shale gas game developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). To make the experience highly relevant to our specific context, for MARGISTAR's training school in Finland, the game was adapted to explore the challenges of remote mountainous regions, the link between EU and local decision-making, and science-policy-society dialogue practice.

This simulation was designed to reflect the real and urgent pressures shaping current European agendas. Thus, REGULANDIA links explicitly to many EU policies, including the Critical Minerals Act and the so-called Omnibus initiative to speed up environmental impact assessment processes as part of the ongoing simplification of EU regulations. The game invited participants to consider how high-level policy choices could generate local consequences and competing claims, using stakeholder dialogue to make these tensions tangible.

To recreate this friction, the game included two rounds. In the first round, a formal science-policy situation was provided in which players had to decide whether legislation for speeding up environmental impact assessment processes was adopted. Once this top-down decision was made, the scenario dramatically shifted to the ground level, quickly escalating the tension. The second round consisted of a simulation of a stakeholder meeting in which a new mine had been granted permission following the sped-up environmental impact assessment process. By negotiating these simulated territorial conflicts, participants explored how Green Deal Diplomacy could be practiced across different interests and governance levels (Sarkki et al., 2026).

The outcome of this simulation went far beyond simply understanding policy dialogue mechanisms. Likewise, the REGULANDIA game led to new insights on credibility, relevance, and legitimacy of knowledge and science-policy interfacing. While these three attributes are widely used in the literature and inform real-world science-policy interfacing practices, experiencing them in a simulated crisis changes everything. Analysis of the exercise identified relational, positional, and embodied dimensions of learning about science-policy interactions. These findings suggest how simulation-based rehearsal can support reflection on the practice of Green Deal Diplomacy (Motlagh et al. submitted).

Structuring Science-Policy Dialogues: The Pinching Toolkit for Mountain Regions

Beyond the simulation game, MARGISTAR developed a proposed pinching cycle to structure science-policy dialogue. This structured approach operationalises the insights, and works by including phases focusing on identifying policy problems, doing knowledge co-production, developing crispy messages (i.e. Policy Pinches), having a reflexive science-policy dialogue on the pinches, and identifying new directions for desirable policy change. To ensure these efforts are grounded in real-world governance, the cycle integrates the policy cycle and research project cycle (Sarkki et al., submitted).

Through this methodological framework, MARGISTAR has identified set of Policy Pinches, including a comprehensive portfolio for policy advocacy. This institutional legacy features a set of ten recommendations for European-level policy changes (Sarkki et al. submitted), alongside the identification of seven key tensions that the policymakers face when seeking to enhance conditions in mountainous regions (Lynn et al. Issues paper). Furthermore, the project translates these systemic issues into targeted formats, such as a policy brief emphasising priorities for strengthening territorial capacity (Motlagh et al., in progress) and a final report of MARGISTAR focusing on policy recommendations to escape polytraps in mountainous regions (Solano-Báez et al., in progress)

Together, these activities connect MARGISTAR's work on mountain revitalization with dialogue on European policy priorities. They offer ways to examine trade-offs, bring diverse knowledge into policy discussions, and strengthen attention to mountain communities in the pursuit of Green Deal objectives.

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