

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

The high mountain (> 2,500 m) is an environment that has been poorly investigated due to its strong constraints, whether climatic, accessibility, or lack of energy resources or communication networks. It is to respond to these knowledge gaps that the "Refuges Sentinelles (RS)" research program, has been developed since 2017 : it takes mountain huts as key environmental and societal "sensors/radars" of the combined effects of rapid climate and cultural change.

In 2021, 25 mountain huts of the Ecrins National Park, Vanoise National Parks and the Mont Blanc Massif are involved in the program. Many professional and territorial stakeholders working in the areas are involved (sports federations, professional unions, tourist offices) and participate in the program's orientation.

This experimental set-up for observing change in the high mountains is based on the mountain hut as a place of measurement, observation, work and exchange between natural and social sciences, taking into account geophysical, climatic and biological processes as well as tourist and sports practices.

RS studies these processes from a dual point of view: on the one hand, "the practitioner" who is observed through the setting up of protocols for the collection of quantitative data (i.e.: number of overnight stays per season) and qualitative data (i.e.: socio-demographic profiles from surveys, huts 'occupancy quota, number of hikers per hike, etc.), in situ observations, collaborative workshops. On the other hand, the "mountain hut wardens" are led in a reflective observation of the evolution of their profession.

Highly exploratory at first, RS is characterized by a sparse configuration, in space and in time: mountain huts located in very diverse areas, differentiated seasonality, which implies monitoring protocols that produce multi-source, multi-format and multi-scale data. Therefore, the main challenge of the program was to set up a permanent observation methodology that could be replicated in other mountains ranges. To this end, the implementation of a geo-database and an interactive cartographic atlas has facilitated the interoperability of multi-source data and federated the various disciplines that intersect in its context.

The spatial approach led to redefine the research questions around the geographical dimension of the 'refuge'. It's considered as a cartographic 'point', a base camp for observations as well as a catalyst of flows and interactions (the routes taken, the human-biodiversity crossings, etc.).

Refuges Sentinelles has initiated a long-term collective brainpower approach between researchers and practitioners and developed tools that contribute to the participatory and educational co-construction of knowledge.