



With contributions from:



Proposal by the French APA working group for the Switzerland 2010 meeting

Joint (internal) document

REFERENCES FOR MOUNTAIN EDUCATION IN THE ALPINE PROTECTED AREAS

Aims of the 2010 document

- To create a common culture and portrayal of the Alps and the mountains
- To work together to build an Alpine cultural identity that can be communicated through protected area's educational activities
- To break down psychological barriers linked to national borders
- To gain recognition for the value of mountain environmental education, initially among teams and management in the Alpine protected areas, to be extended later to local and Alpine partners
- To demonstrate the benefits of being linked up and of mutual understanding, to generate interest in working together across the Alps.

Why it is worth taking the time to read this document

It is relevant to all decision-makers and policy officers dealing with environmental education.
It has been produced specifically for you by our team

It is designed to save you time when setting up mountain environmental education schemes - why reinvent the wheel?

It will allow you to learn new things and inspire you to discuss ideas with international counterparts

It will open the door to input from other Alpine protected areas, which will benefit everyone.



1 - A view of the mountains and protected areas – special places for environmental education

By Claude Dautrey (Head of Communication Department at the Ecrins National Park), contribution written for the French Alpine Protected Areas group, October 2009

By way of introduction

Nine in ten people now live in urban environments. The dramatic rise of the consumer society has radically changed the way that we obtain knowledge and information.

The tools used have also altered, as information is now accessed in digital form, available worldwide, with simulations taking the place of practical experiments from which conclusions can be drawn.

Education is in a state of flux, moving in a new direction where personal experience is no longer relevant. The spread of a globalised, self-contained one-size-fits-all model which has eliminated personal experience and risk reflects the expectations of today's extremely regulated society. All of us are now able to view the whole world from the comfort of our own homes.

Henceforth, environmental education could confine itself to encouraging citizens to be greener, dispensing with a personal encounter with the wonders and benefits of precious natural resources.

Mountains, coastlines and the countryside are all becoming little more than consumer venues, offering a standardised range of emotional experiences that have been tailored for short stays and a mass audience.

And yet the mountains are glorious

Nevertheless, now more than ever, rural and natural areas, especially mountain areas, are places of discovery and learning.

Experiencing these places, in the purest sense of the word, means exploring and becoming a part of the history of human settlement of the land.

It is here that humans found shelter, creating a place of their own thousands of years ago and establishing a relationship with their surroundings which has barely changed over the centuries.

Simply making your way uphill at altitude is enough to gain an insight into the conditions that those pioneering settlers faced. Everyone can appreciate and understand that integration is the only possible solution in a challenging natural environment. We need to find a place of our own, to choose our paths wisely and be

sparing in our use of everything we encounter. It is a valuable lesson in resource management.

Visiting the mountains also means being active at some level. We have long since moved on from talk of conquest: rather than defying, we seek to tame our surroundings, as harmonious coexistence becomes both a necessity and a choice.

This is a practical lesson based on first-hand experience; we build on observation and analysis to identify logical solutions and basic principles for living. We learn to minimise effort and avoid risk.

These experiences are extremely informative, giving visitors an introduction to the natural world. Although firmly rooted in reality, our experiences fire the imagination. Innovation, creativity and the ability to adapt are all stimulated by a mountain experience. In mountain areas we can rediscover forgotten and forsaken values: helping one's fellow man, pulling together, sometimes in a fairly isolated place.

Listening, an open mind and hard work are essential to achieving one's goals. Visitors gain an appreciation of the range of potential solutions and the value of pooling resources.

Independence, a sense of time and space and the demands of walking tours change the way we see the world. The mountains force us to change the way we live. They take us away from the noisy world and subliminal messages, instead teaching us about the power and reality of the elements, how to choose our path carefully, about the satisfaction of a successful climb, no matter how modest, to a col or summit from which a whole new vista opens up. The mountains instruct us in the essentials of life.

Protected areas: historical areas waiting to be explored

When not fitted out as a full-blown tourist destination, mountain areas are often classified as protected.

Parks and reserves are havens for rare and valuable natural resources, providing tranquillity far from the monotony of urban spaces and homogenised lifestyles. This break from normality takes us back to the bare essentials of life.

Protected areas throughout the Alps are places of outstanding natural beauty and interest. In managing these vast natural areas we seek to preserve plant and wildlife, traditional activities and landscapes.

The land can be read and understood: these are places to experience values and resources that have been erased and eroded elsewhere. The mountains teach us about magnitude and duration, we experience silence and solitude, not to mention all four seasons in the course of a walk. We are reminded of the rhythm of day and night, watching the sun rise and set as the world goes to sleep and comes to life.

We learn - or are reminded - that we are part of the wider world. Mountain villages and communities, guides, wardens, shepherds – all can be teachers. The trails, landscapes and people, the unadorned reality of the mountains, the local inhabitants patiently coping with life on the mountainsides, all have simple lessons to teach us. Connections become

clear: learning about the environment is learning about being part of mankind.

Mankind's interactions with the world are brought into stark relief.

In a marked contrast to urban life, here we examine the links between man and the natural world. We are brought face-to-face with the disparities between different lifestyles, even prompted to question the meaning of life itself. We are confronted with the notion of other lives and places.

Chalets and refuges, villages and shepherd's huts, schools and glaciers, all serve to explore and learn about the mountains in these protected areas. We want visitors to experience and understand the mountain environment.

Being in a particular mountain valley with a guide, a warden, a teacher, parents or friends gives us a fresh insight into our humanity and the natural world. We are prompted to consider the meaning of life and our own identity. We venture out to learn new things in new ways.



Photos: 1 Ecrins National Park; 2 REEMA; 3 Queyras Regional Nature Park; 4 Massif des Bauges Regional Nature Park



2 - Mountain environmental education in the Alpine protected areas

2.1 - THE REALITIES OF THE MOUNTAINS

What makes mountain areas different:

- Very specific conditions linked to relief and altitude
- Special geological features found in the landscape: folds, glaciers, natural dangers, etc.
- Natural features which limit human activities (mountain farming, habitat, land management – tunnels, etc.)
- Unique natural resources: wildlife and plants have adapted to the environment; high-altitude ecosystems are a haven for some plants and animals that have survived since the last ice age
- Relatively low population density, with populations concentrated in urban areas and a delicate balance between urban and mountain areas
- Professional mobility of inhabitants: the mountain economy is partly built around on migratory labour and multi-skilling
- Human communities are very creative, with innovative forms of mutual support
- Traditional jobs and roles: shepherds, ski lift attendants, mountain farmers, glaciologists, etc.
- A whole range of intermediaries: mountain and trekking guides, hut guardians, experts on local nature and culture
- Different mountain stakeholders often form networks (organised by valley, subject matter, areas of interest, etc.).

A mountain culture

- Minimising effort, avoiding risk
- Working together, mutual assistance and support, sometimes in a relatively isolated place → strong sense of community
- Innovation, creativity, ability to adapt
- Independence, sense of time and space
- Special attachment to the mountain environment.



2.2 PERCEPTION OF MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE ALPINE PROTECTED AREAS

Mountain education is based on sound education principles

- The land: going out, physical activity, walking tours
- Personal experience: staying in a hut, bivouacking in the mountains
- Encounters: meeting shepherds, hut guardians, guides, park wardens
- Learning about risk, individual and collective responsibility
- The mountain environment is often enough: few teaching aids required.

What do Alpine protected areas have to offer in terms of mountain environmental education?

What sets protected areas apart from other mountain areas?

- Conservation of natural resources, landscape and human communities
- The notion of **heritage**: natural features, cultural traditions and landscapes. The Alpine protected areas have an additional asset to offer in environmental education for sustainable development: a brand known for nature and conservation
- The protected areas seek to **raise the profile of the mountain environment** and to develop a mountain culture that focuses more on positive aspects rather than on hazards and prohibitions. They present the mountains in a positive light and nurture the mythological associations

- The protected areas have substantial **financial and human resources** which allow them to showcase the highlights of the mountain areas (which is harder for other mountainous regions)
- What really sets the Alpine protected areas apart is the fact that mankind has chosen to invest resources in these places as opposed to elsewhere. **As a result, most mountain areas enjoy protected status**
- The protected areas have an **extensive knowledge of the mountain environment** which enables them to carry out conservation activities
- The protected areas' status and expertise gives them **legitimacy and recognition** (e.g. park wardens are active in the mountain environment on a daily basis).

Note: Managing natural dangers in mountain areas is not the primary goal of the protected areas.



2.3 - ALPINE IDENTITIES

The Alps: Alpine identities in intercultural discussion

The reality of Alpine identities

Some starting points:

- An imposing and rugged landscape, with plant and animal species found only in this environment (such as the iconic black grouse)
- The concept of the Alpine region has been shaped by a culture of movement: peddlers and migration
- Alpine culture has roots way back in history. The Alps are a homogeneous area in human terms: human activities in high and low-altitude areas are similar throughout the mountain range
- The Alps are located in the heart of Europe and extend over different countries. The idea of the Alps as a single entity is relatively recent, as is borne out by the Alpine protected areas
- The Alps can be broken down into different geographical groupings: from small valleys to mountain ranges to the Alps as a massif (from local to global)

Have the Alpine protected areas really taken the notion of Alpine identity on board?

What does an Alpine identity add to mountain culture and traditions? Do towns and villages see themselves as *Alpine*? Where can we find sociological data on this subject?

There is a strong administrative element which is out of synch with more cultural divisions of Alpine areas. Borders remain important, but all areas have one thing in common: human's ability to adapt to their surroundings, which knows no bounds.

How can we preserve strong Alpine identities?

→ By highlighting certain features of the Alpine identity, such as transport. Identifying shared values: contact, movement, paths, roads, etc. Focussing on the reasons for movements within these areas and encouraging interaction between different valleys and mountain ranges (e.g. exchanges involving young people).

→ Further work and fine-tuning required: some areas tend to be inward-looking – exploring the concept of Alpine identity could be a way of expanding their horizons. This would need to be done in conjunction with teachers and educators in each area. Examples: identifying commonalities between the Alps and other mountain ranges, studying mobility patterns linked to resources (*migration from the Alps to Mexico*).

→ Alpine identity is a figurative concept

The Alpine identity is relatively recent construct and has taken shape as attention has shifted away from borders and conflicts to focus instead on European integration. This notional identity is linked to a shared mountain culture. The concept of Alpine identity is a starting point for discussion.

→ An opportunity for educating citizens

The idea of Alpine identity allows us to address issues linked to general education: open-mindedness, dealing with differences, etc. → How can we use the particularities of the Alps as a whole to illustrate the notion of belonging to one place and being open to others in discussions?