

How to manage a national park? Asking the right questions to manage an alpine protected area: les Ecrins

Hervé CORTOT

The National Park les Ecrins

Created in 1973, the National Park les Ecrins has a special place in the Alps: it is the largest park in France located between the North and the South Alps. The central area (91.800 ha of protection) and the peripheral area spread over 270.000 ha with approximately 30.000 inhabitants. The National Park Les Écrins is a public establishment and employs one hundred of persons.

The Écrins territory is organised around a series of high mountaintops: Meije, Écrins, Pelvoux, Bans, Olan, and Sirac. Some of the mountain sides cover an altitude range of more than 2000 m. Long and deep valleys meet at the core of the crystalline massif. To the North and especially to the South, the relief is less rough: sedimentary mountains open on wider valleys, with far-reaching plateaux that allow the development of high pastures. Mountain passes make the exchanges between valleys easier. Today, the Cols that are easy going and easy to set up are used as road crossings in particular: the main Cols are the Col Bayard, the Col d'Ornon and the Col du Lautaret.

High mountains (from 800m to 4102 m, the top of les Écrins) have a significant part of mineral, glacier and grass. Lots of valleys are faced with a decreasing agriculture.

For over 30 year, the National Park benefits from tools on managing information. To gain knowledge and experience in the field is essential for the National Park' missions:

- ◆ The rangers (50) are well motivated and qualified. They are long-made up of inhabitants and naturalists.
- ◆ There is currently a staff of 7 scientific workers. This staff is advised by a scientific committee. By the way, we are please to work with people on the long view.
- ◆ Two universities are not so far: Grenoble (100 km) and Marseille (180 km).

30 years and such a work!

- ◆ Strong inventories: ordinary for a protected area: flora, fauna but also geology and geomorphology. Landscapes have been studied within the "DELPHINE" method" Special work on lakes and groves has been carried with Universities. In social studies, the work on the National Park history and on Archaeology are in progress.
- ◆ The following step has been the monitoring: of rare plants, populations of chamois, gallineous birds, golden eagles, but also glaciers and physical parameters. The more original is the health monitoring for wild fauna, air pollutions, the visitors management, flying over mountain...
- ◆ Main points of this period:
 - the growth of biodiversity (by introducing the alpine Ibex, for instance)
 - the partnership with farming on 3 types of landscapes: alpine pasture, reaped meadows and hedged farming.
 - the symbolic creation of the Lauvitel Reserve with a special scientific program
- ◆ After 30 years, it is an important core which is diversified, with different quality, useful for:
 - official documents: regional development program, local planning management, atlas, Natura 2000 sites
 - databases
 - information for visitors centres
 - training for the National Park employees

This knowledge is a resource for the scientific research in the territory and an important source of information for visitors and inhabitants.

The question is: what kind of information on the long run?

To be exact:

- ◆ What is of importance to survey and to monitor?
- ◆ Which external links? international or national networks?
 - *In France, an attempt is currently in progress to create real exchanges between French National Parks.*
- ◆ Which is the public targeted? How to relate back the information?

These questions have been examined, collected and organised by three axis (during the choice for the regional development program 2005-2010 meeting):

- ◆ to consider global factors acting on the territory development
- ◆ to measure the environmental changes to use management tools and practices
- ◆ to plan out conditions to preserve species
- ◆ to give elements concerning the territory memory

After a discussion and a debate, the scientific committee and the board of directors made the following choices:

- ◆ to continue the monitoring with priorities
- ◆ to start working on biogeographical data by environment (monitoring species – temporal and space)
- ◆ the operating of the space (environment and species)
- ◆ monitoring and evaluation of human activities (winter tourism, sport pollutions ...)
- ◆ going with disturbances (wolf , wild boar)
- ◆ to develop long term monitoring (flora, fauna)
- ◆ to develop knowledge on water
- ◆ to keep up the National Park culture (changes of rangers generation)
- ◆ to collect cultural knowledge

Some thoughts

- ◆ **Expert or heckler?** If a better knowledge is necessary to legitimate the National Park (useful for communication and for the territory management), the actors of the territory can be embarrassed. "More we know, more it's difficult to integrate obligations and to make choices" for politics.
- ◆ **Scientific knowledge, popular knowledge.** How to integrate popular information and to contribute for the preservation of cultural diversity? How to understand the local culture without local staff ?
- ◆ **To relate back our information on the territory.** It is necessary for the acceptance and the development not only for inhabitants, but also for the technical public and visitors. It's not the same level of knowledge.
- ◆ **Sciences and alpine protected areas:**
A little research on this particular territory and on protected areas problems. We are concerned by the disappearing of the naturalists able to help us.
- ◆ **Long term information:**
Which information can be useful in the future to preserve and to manage our space? A large amount of work has to be done on the processing of our data.
- ◆ **Networks, a chance for protected areas?**
Today, it's a stake to share our knowledge, our methods and to move on together.

In a world more and more standardized and planned, a National Park is moving, it changes, it goes forward. It's a real dynamic... May be it is like our knowledge where it's possible to get lost and to find back, as in the Écrins territory!

Contact

Hervé CORTOT, chef du service scientifique
hervé.cortot@espaces-naturels.fr

Parc National des Ecrins
Domaine de Charance
F 05 000 Gap
France

ZOBODAT - www.zobodat.at

Zoologisch-Botanische Datenbank/Zoological-Botanical Database

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Cortot Hervé

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