Scientific councils in the Alps:
Results from a preliminary study

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WHAT IS A SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ?

A definition work

This object has various designations : scientific council, scientific committee, research council…

Scientific councils (SC) in the field of environnemental policy are a way of organizing relations between scientists and environnemental managers. Scientific councils can be defined as interdisciplinary and interinstitutional groups which assist institutions such as protected areas.

Instituting a scientific council in the decision-making structure is mandatory in some structures and countries.

Scientific councils as a research object

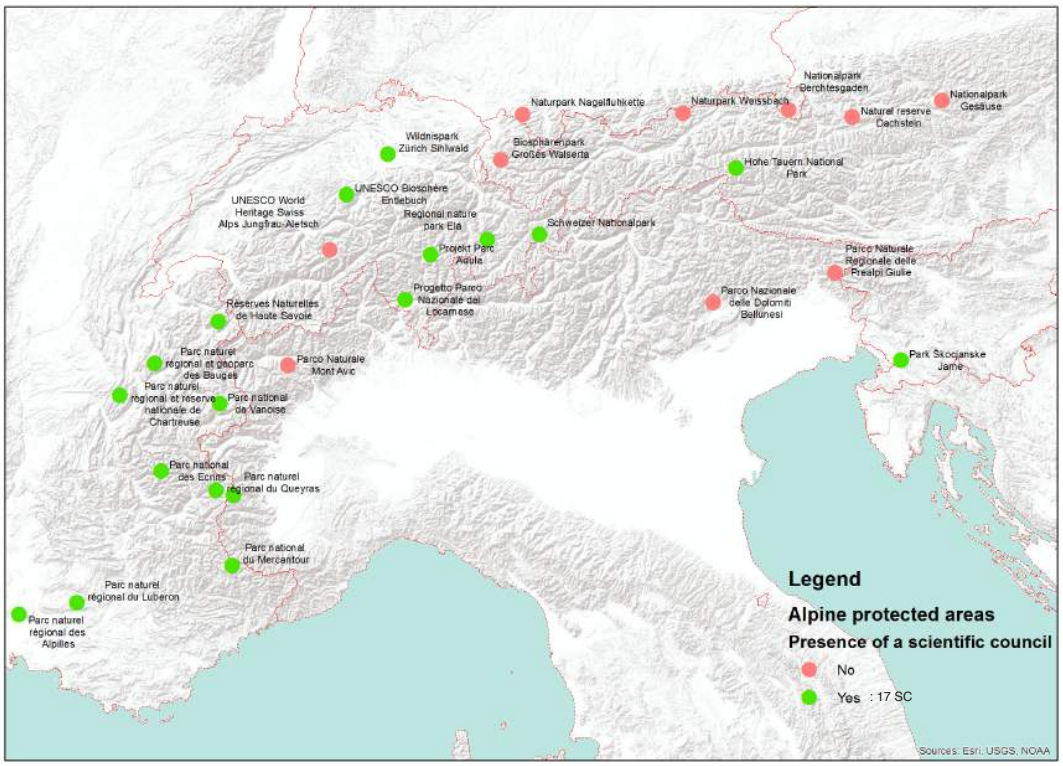
Method: three studies at different scales:

• a survey for collecting information about scientific councils in the Alps: a **questionnaire** was sent out to all alpine protected areas (February – May 2015) : 27 answers were obtained.

• a national study to collect general info about scientific councils in France

• PhD thesis in progress: ethnography of 3 scientific councils (French Alps)

ARE SCIENTIFIC COUNCILS COMMON IN THE ALPS ?



Scientific councils in alpine protected areas - answers to the questionnaire

France : scientific councils are almost systematic in the protected areas (PA).

Switzerland : in a majority of cases

Italy : tight relations between PAs and university in some cases – SC uncommon

Austria : few Austrian parks have a scientific council

Slovenia and Germany : not enough data

In the rest of the world : apparently uncommon ?

SCIENTIFIC COUNCILS AS EXCHANGE APPARATUS ?

All the studied scientific councils have an organization that could promote this role of interface at different levels :

Internal organization

• *Date of creation* : most of the scientific councils were created a few years after the creation of the related protected areas.

• *Frequence of the plenary meetings* : 2 to 3 per year

• *Average number of members per scientific council*: 16 (min: 5 members, max: 40 members)

• Members are not only academics: 36% of the members do not come from universities. They can be naturalists, local experts or professionals…

• Scientific councils are interdisciplinary groups : 29 disciplines are represented in the scientific councils that constituted the sample. Life sciences are the most represented, but an important place has also been given to social sciences, notably geography and sociology.

• In all cases, PA employees participate in the scientific council meetings.

The scientific council productions are at the interface with the PA

The productions of the scientific councils are varied and multiple.

a majority of the scientific councils provide advice to the PA managers.

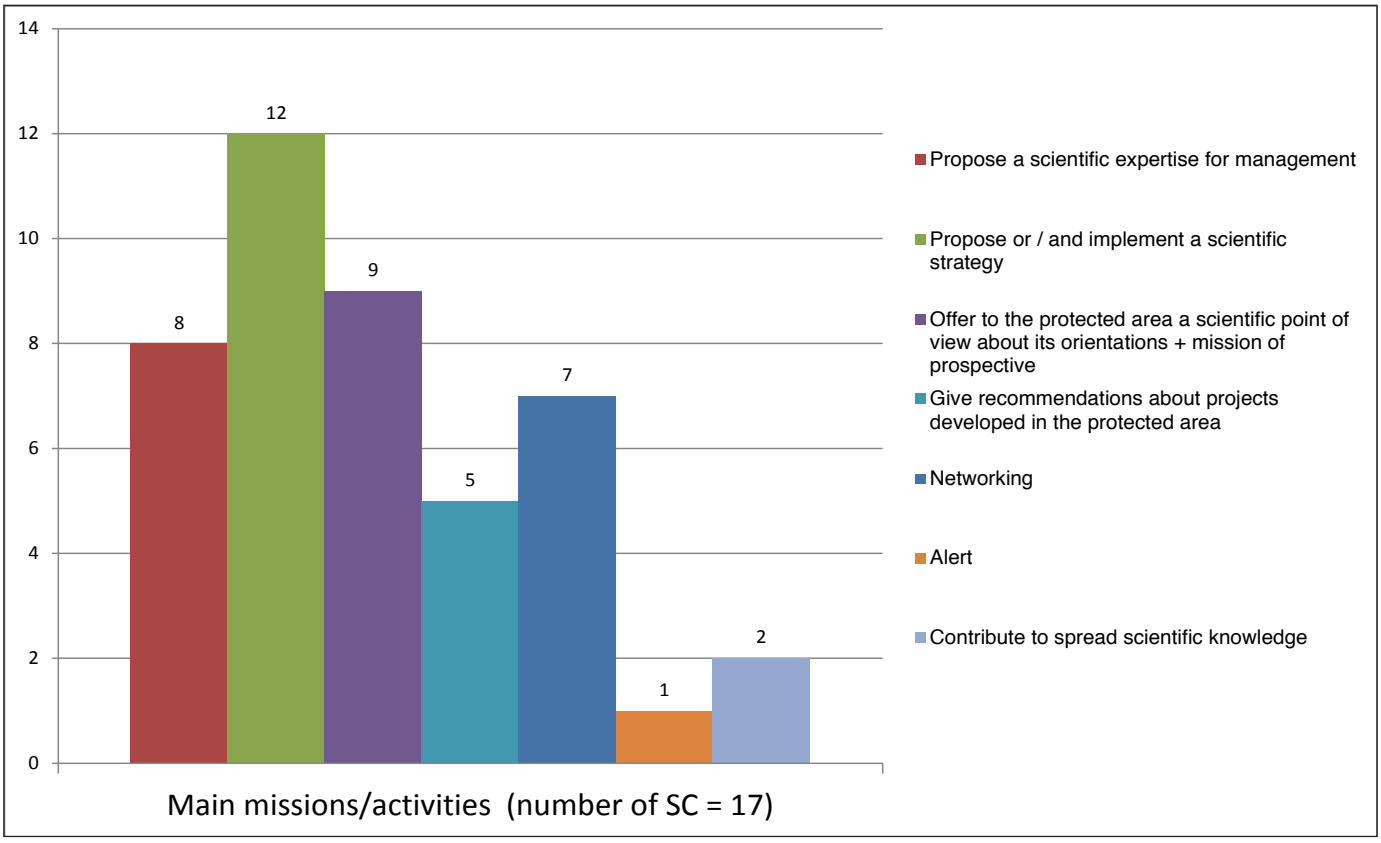
This production can consist of official advices (intended by the administration), evaluations of monitoring activities, assessments of procedures and protocols.

the advices and proposals coming from the council are generally taken into account in the PA research policy

= this process of interactions depends on the quality of exchange and communications between the scientific council and the PA governing body.

Key missions of elaborating strategies / advices and networking

Seven missions are taken in charge by the scientific councils that we studied.



ARE THERE LINKS BETWEEN THE ACTORS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION ?

Scientific councils are not the unique tool to organize the coordination between science and management at the scale of a protected area.

Many protected areas organize their relations with science and universities by themselves, without creating a scientific council. In the questionnaire, various modes of collaboration between science and protected areas were mentioned by the respondents: mandating research, recruiting scientists, developing common research projects, promoting cooperation in networks, training, organizing excursions, hosting masters or doc students, preparing events... Having a scientific service or a scientific journal are also important ways of relating to science.

So does a link exist between these different actors and do they create links with the scientific council ?

Scientific service

All national parks have a scientific service and 55% of the protected areas in the study have a scientific service (average : 3 employees.) This service works in close coordination with the scientific council when it exists.

But the link between scientific service and council is not clear :
- 65% of the PAs with a SC have a scientific service
- 40% of the PAs without a SC have a scientific service

Scientific journal

Only 4 PAs (out of 27) still have a scientific journal.

Having a scientific journal is not linked to the existence of a scientific council. The researches realized in the park may be published elsewhere.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

While these results need to be completed, this first study on alpine scientific councils provides much information about this object. We notice some simitarities in the organization of scientific councils across cases which allow us to grasp scientific councils as a unified research object.

Moreover, two countries seem to have an intensive pratice of scientific councils: **France and Switzerland.** The Swiss national park was the first in Europe to create a scientific council (1917) to guide the research led within the national park.
Did it become a model for the rest of the scientific councils in Europe?