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The Environment at the Summit

Actors and representations of nature conservation in mountain areas: a global perspective (late 18th–early 21st century)



2–4.9.2026

Mendrisio,
Palazzo Turconi T0.05
Via Alfonso Turconi
USI-Accademia di architettura

Conference of the International Association for Alpine History
in conjunction with
the Department of Contemporary History, University of Fribourg

10.45–12.45 **Panel I.**
Between conservation and nature protection in the Alpine region
Moderator: **Luigi Lorenzetti** (University of Italian Switzerland, Mendrisio)

Perpetuating "the memory of the great phenomenon": Alphonse Favre (1815–1890) and the preservation of erratic boulders on the Salève

Audrey Azar

Mont Salève, a mountain in Haute-Savoie located on the Franco-Swiss border, has been a favourite of the Geneva section of the Swiss Alpine Club since 1865. They have established and maintained routes there and identified points of interest. As early as 1866, before the patriotic "Call to the Swiss" that would make him a staunch advocate for erratic boulders, the section's president and geologist, Alphonse Favre (1815–1890) reminded members of his personal initiatives to ensure their preservation. Furthermore, the Geneva section owns a late 19th–century album, "Erratic Boulders SAC Geneva Section", containing almost exclusively prints of boulders from Salève. One of the photographs shows the "F" that Alphonse Favre had engraved to "reserve" certain boulders. Does F stand for Favre or for France? The letter could be misleading.

In any case, the preservation of the Salève's erratic blocks by the Genevan citizens allows them to assert a dual authority, both touristic and scientific, over a territory outside national borders. The publication of guidebooks and the creation of exhibitions, photographic albums, and dedicated maps contribute to establishing this authority, reinforced by the purchase and donation of properties by some members. An analysis of these archives, held at the Geneva section, highlights the role of these practices in the heritage designation of the Salève's erratic boulders. Furthermore, the fear of their disappearance due to human activity reinforces the connection between the erratic boulders and the melting of glaciers. Present in Favre's discourse, revisiting this pivotal period between the understanding of glacial phenomena and the beginnings of retreat measures also enables us to examine the notion of photographic memory in the face of current climate challenges.

Nature, landscape and cultural area protection in the German and Italian-speaking Alpine region (1880–1914)

Michael Wedekind

My contribution to the study of "Nature, Landscape, and Cultural Landscape Conservation in the German- and Italian-speaking Alpine Region between approximately 1880 and 1914" investigates the social actors involved in these conservation efforts and their ideological foundations from a comparative perspective. It further analyses the triggers for action, processes of awareness, motivations, concerns, articulation, demands, strategies, successes, and ideological positions of individual and collective actors. As a first step, it examines the interrelationships between tourism and the natural environment in the context of the touristification of the Alpine region in the decades around 1900. It explores how recent perceptions, images, and concepts of control shifted compared to the early aristocratic-bourgeois experience of the high mountains in the late 18th century, and how this alienation from original ideals and initial landscape aesthetics was perceived within the emerging conservationist circles. This article examines the reactions of these circles to the exploitation of natural resources and investigates how they perceived the new attributions of meaning, the touristic use and 'occupation,' the (internal) colonialist approach, and the appropriation of natural spaces. The study asks: How did nature and landscape conservation circles respond to the increasing economisation of nature and landscape, the intensified development and modernisation of alpine tourism? How did they perceive design interventions, alterations, lasting changes, and the shift in the aesthetic values of inherited landscapes? How did they assess the epoch-typical development whereby increased control over nature was

accompanied by an alienation of the individual from nature? So how did they position themselves in relation to the corruption of those constitutive elements that had formed the intellectual foundations of the aestheticisation and emotionalisation of the high mountains and the basis for the success of "high" tourism? How did they fundamentally view the relationship between humankind and the environment? The first associations and societies to react to this initially had a predominantly scientific and academic focus (protection of alpine plants; botanical gardens). Soon, however, even within the formally organised alpine movement, conservationist tendencies, and later environmental and landscape protection tendencies, began to be articulated, primarily through publications, although these stood in stark contrast to their efforts to further intensify tourism. Only around the turn of the century did their environmental protection ideas gain broader scope, now encompassing nature conservation, environmental protection, and "homeland protection," and finally resulting in the first state regulations and measures. At the same time, the 'homeland protection movements' more emphatically opposed the commercialisation, trivialisation, and infantilisation of nature, landscape, and cultural space. Particularly in Austria and Germany, these ideas were sometimes intertwined with a nationalist, ethnic, anti-modern, and anti-urban ideology that, in a time of change and acceleration, countered a supposedly corrosive modernity with new, ethno-national identities.

Nature and environmental protection in mountaineering / by mountaineers in Saxony – core element or conflict area of intangible cultural heritage?

Antje Reppe

The mountaineering and climbing culture in the Saxon Elbe Sandstone Mountains has been listed in Germany as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO since 2024 under the title "Mountaineering in Saxony." This designation followed the successful completion of a comprehensive, bottom-up application process, which the German UNESCO Commission uses to recognise living traditions and showcase them through a nationwide directory. The Saxon Mountaineering Association (SBB), which acted as the "supporting body" in the application process, was able to clearly demonstrate in its application dossier that the unique character of climbing in the Elbe Sandstone Mountains lies not solely in the sport itself, but rather in the holistic approach of the local climbing culture, which combines nature and environmental protection, risk minimisation, knowledge transfer, and camaraderie. The article "Nature and Environmental Protection in Mountaineering / by Mountaineers in Saxony – Core Element or Area of Conflict of Intangible Cultural Heritage?" explores this further. The climbing culture in the Elbe Sandstone Mountains will be examined historically with regard to its commitment to environmental protection and interwoven with a cultural studies perspective. The so-called "Saxon Switzerland" exhibits a close connection between natural and cultural landscapes, characterised by its long-standing and established importance for both nature conservation and mountaineering. Since the end of the 19th century, with the ascent of the Falkenstein by gymnasts from Schandau (1864) considered the birth of climbing in the region, a specific climbing philosophy has developed, focusing on sustainable and environmentally friendly mountaineering practices. This does not, however, preclude conflicts with nature conservation and forestry authorities; consensus must be constantly renegotiated. Many activities of the climbers and the Saxon Climbing Association (SBB) – from adhering to the Saxon Climbing Rules to the Association's organisational structure with working groups such as the Nature and Environmental Protection Working Group (AG NUS), and initiatives like establishing nesting protection zones or monitoring peregrine falcons – therefore stem not only from a certain sense of responsibility but also aim to preserve and ensure the future of their climbing culture. How do current areas of conflict, such as the ban on "boofen" (free overnight shelters for climbers), relate to solution strategies–primarily the Alpine Sports Convention and ongoing efforts to raise awareness, network, and disseminate information? What role did environmental protection aspects play in the normative cultural heritage process (heritagisation)? And what related, interdisciplinary research questions can be derived with regard to further (inter)national inventories of mountain (sport)-specific cultural practices?

The making of national summits. The "elites" of the Swiss Alpine Club between territorial discoveries, sporting achievements and landscape protection (1860s–1930s)
Gregory Quin

In a nation where mountains play such a significant role, both in terms of topographical landscapes and as a defining element of the collective imagination, the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) occupies a key position at the intersection of the dynamics of sportification and those of a growing sensitivity to the environment and landscape. Thanks to its rotating leadership – the SAC administration changes from section to section every two or three years – the organisation also relies on the involvement of a local elite to become deeply rooted in the region and contribute to the true "creation" of its summits (from the Matterhorn to the Eiger, including the Säntis and the Rigi). These summits must be explored and climbed, but also quickly protected from the pressures of rapidly expanding tourism. In fact, between unfinished projects and successful constructions of funiculars or rack railways, the analysis of the commitment of the CAS elites at the turn of the 20th century also invites us to a reading of technical and social modernity. Therefore, within the framework of this contribution, our ambition is to present elements of a prosopography of the leaders of the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) in order to understand their commitments to territorial exploration, sporting achievements, and landscape protection. While we wish to begin with the creation of the SAC in the 1860s, our research period extends to the 1930s. Indeed, the interwar period marked a kind of peak in the tensions between the development strategies of mountain territories and the emergence of early landscape sensibilities. Around the first ski lifts specifically dedicated to skiing (the first T-bars dating from the second half of the 1930s), we will also be able to highlight the ongoing re-emergence of some more ethical conflicts between the different currents within mountaineering. That being said, we are excluding the period following the Second World War, which was marked by dynamics of a different nature, both economically, with the post-war boom known as the *Trente Glorieuses* (Thirty Glorious Years), in sports and tourism, particularly with the rise of alpine skiing, and politically, with the more structured assertion of environmental concerns– all dynamics and issues that will undoubtedly require further investigation. To conduct our analyses, we rely primarily on an in-depth examination of the administrative documents (meetings, central committee minutes, official journals) of the Swiss Alpine Club (both central and those from local sections), as well as on case studies focusing on specific locations or emblematic individuals.

14:00–15:45 **Panel II.**
Develop or protect nature?
Moderator: **Claude Hauser** (University of Friborg)

"Barbarism" in the name of progress? Controversy surrounding Alpine hydropower projects
Sebastian Kasper

Large hydropower projects in the Alps are extremely controversial. Currently, for example, the plan for a pumped-storage power plant in the upper Kaunertal valley in Tyrol is leading to massive protests. The alliance of opponents, who fear the destruction of alpine nature, ranges from large organisations such as the Alpine Clubs, various nature conservation associations, and the WWF to local stakeholders. The proponents, above all the future operator TIWAG, see this project as an important contribution to the energy transition and thus to climate protection. But long before climate protection became a topic of discussion, hydropower plants in the Alps were controversial and led to protests. For example, as early as 1908, the following was said about the planned Walchensee power station in Bavaria: “Plans are underway that should concern not only all of Bavaria, but all of Germany, if progress and technology were not synonymous with cultural progress for many. […] To turn the vibrant Isar, the archetype and jewel of our Bavarian fatherland, into a lifeless, desolate riverbed is not only an act of barbarity that offends human sensibilities, but it also means enormous damage to the local population.” Over forty years later, in 1949, residents of Bad Tölz, during an expansion of the Walchensee power plant, “blocked

the access road to the festival grounds with a barricade in protest before the opening ceremony, in order to prevent the Bavarian Finance Minister, who was to give the keynote address, from attending." Protests against electrotechnical infrastructure projects in the Alps are therefore not new, but as old as electrification itself. However, the actors, their demands, and their perceptions of nature have changed dramatically in the last 150 years. In this article, I will outline this transformation using selected examples, focusing primarily on early protests against the landscape reshaping of the Alps by the electricity grid.

Entre exploration and protection of nature. The dilemmas of underground mountaineering in Poland between 1945 and 1989.

Michał Kuryłowicz

The Polish cave-mountaineering community developed in an organised manner after 1945. Interest in exploring underground caves in mountainous areas went hand in hand with the growth of the entire community and, inevitably, with a kind of "exploration race", particularly evident in the highest mountains: the Tatra Mountains. The speed and scale of the discoveries (by 1969, the deepest cave in Poland already had a vertical drop of 783 meters, making it the 6th deepest in the world) stimulated competition, both in the field of exploration and in that of purely sporting achievements (for example, setting a record for climbing in a cave in 1966). From the outset, cave exploration required trespassing in nature reserves, and activities inside the caves left traces of human presence (exploration equipment, camping gear). Ecological awareness and the need to protect the "nature" of caves gradually developed among Polish speleologists and were closely linked to the specific political and social context in which Polish cave climbing emerged. The dynamic development of this community occurred at a time when the communist government was exerting pressure to "democratise" mountaineering in Poland (that is, to popularise the activity and link it to tourism). Simultaneously, however, the process of nature conservation in the Tatra Mountains continued, culminating in the creation of the Tatra National Park. The author of this paper analyses the evolution of regulations concerning the protection of Tatra caves between 1945 and 1989, focusing on the key actors involved in this process: representatives of the mountaineering community and the Tatra National Park. The author also examines the research hypothesis that the professional background of many Polish speleologists contributed to the debate surrounding cave conservation. Since the 1950s, the organisational structure of Polish speleology has included representatives from the scientific community (particularly the natural sciences), which may have facilitated the acceptance by speleologists of restrictions imposed on exploration activities. The author also highlights the dynamic relationship between the aforementioned actors involved in cave conservation and the communist authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, who were wary of spontaneous and uncontrolled social activities.

From a "productive" nature to nature conservation: the production of mountain landscapes in Ecuador (1940–1990)

Jeroen Derkinderen Lombeyda

In this presentation, I analyse the evolution of perceptions and uses of mountain environments in Ecuador between the 1940s and 1990s, showing how the Andes gradually shifted from the status of "productive" spaces to that of landscapes to be protected. The study adopts an environmental history perspective and argues that the conservation of Ecuadorian mountains is the result of a complex interaction between scientific knowledge, public policies, transnational interests, and discourses related to Andeanism. In the mid-20th century, conservation in Ecuador still largely relied on a logic of productive development of nature. The figure of the botanist and conservationist Misael Acosta Solís illustrates this paradox: while advocating the protection of natural spaces, he encouraged the introduction of species such as eucalyptus and pine in order to "improve" Andean landscapes according to scientific and economic criteria. This vision was part of a context marked by the circulation of international models of productivisation, the development of scientific knowledge, and the production

of maps that made mountain areas visible and manageable. Here, Andeanism undeniably played a key role in the symbolic construction of the Andes as spaces of natural beauty, leisure, and national identity. From the 19th century onward, the peaks of the Sierra became cultural emblems celebrated in the arts, literature, and scientific discourse. Andeanism clubs then played a part in the rise of a narrative in support of mountain preservation, initially motivated by recreational activity, but which gradually contributed to legitimising their protection. Between 1966 and 1987, the creation of several national parks and nature reserves profoundly transformed environmental governance in the Ecuadorian Andes. These policies, supported by international NGOs and foreign experts, were presented by the State as instruments for tourism development and modernisation. However, they also generated tensions with local populations owing to restrictions on land access and use. In the 1980s, Andean communities developed a stronger environmental awareness around the issues of waste, erosion, and tourism. This was undoubtedly in dialogue with the 1982 Kathmandu Declaration. This study thus highlights how Ecuadorian mountain landscapes have been simultaneously exploited, imagined and protected, revealing the persistent tensions between productivity, tourism and conservation in the construction of contemporary environmental thought.

Mountain Day: Post-War Nature Protection in the Japanese Alps

Fynn Holm & Sherief Fitz & Thomas Jones

On August 11th, 2016, Japan introduced a new national holiday called "Mountain Day" (yama no hi), which was established to commemorate the alleged deep religious and cultural connection between the Japanese people and their mountainscape. The national holiday was inaugurated by the then crown prince Naruhito, an enthusiastic mountaineer himself, in the high-altitude valley of Kamikōchi (Nagano Prefecture). As we argue in this paper, the choice to celebrate the first holiday in Kamikōchi was no accident: described as the "heart of the Japanese Alps", Kamikōchi has a long history as the birthplace both of Japanese mountaineering and of environmental protection of mountain landscapes, reaching back to the early twentieth century. This paper investigates how environmental protection in Kamikōchi evolved in the post-war period, focusing on the shifting relationship between legal conservation frameworks and local stakeholder action. Following Japan's designation of Kamikōchi as part of the Chūbu-Sangaku National Park in 1934, the post-war decades witnessed the transformation of the valley from a site of competitive industrial interests to a managed recreational landscape where local communities navigated increasingly stringent environmental regulations. Drawing on interviews with hotel operators, mountain hut managers, and archival materials, this paper demonstrates how local stakeholders responded to the national park regime through creative negotiation, compliance, and occasionally resistance. Key initiatives included the establishment of the Association to Beautify Kamikōchi in 1963, the implementation of vehicle restrictions beginning in the mid-1970s, and the designation of hiking seasons and facility-use limits that froze accommodation capacity at 1,500 guests. Rather than viewing nature protection as a top-down imposition, local actors reframed conservation as integral to their own livelihoods and moral commitments. The paper argues that this localised form of environmental stewardship emerged not from abstract conservation ideology but from pragmatic engagement with the tensions between tourism, ecological preservation, and the changing climate of the valley. Mountain Day is a good example that showcases these tensions. Unlike most other national holidays, Mountain Day originated not in a governmental directive but in grassroots movements of mountaineers who wanted to raise public awareness of environmental issues, especially those relating to the precarious mountain ecosystems. However, the additional holiday specifically for mountains led to a surge in visitors which had unforeseen issues for the mountain environment, such as increased litter and overstrained infrastructure. The case of Kamikōchi thus illustrates how post-war Japanese environmental protection at mountain sites depended critically on the labour, knowledge, and ongoing negotiation of local communities, whose efforts to maintain the valley's natural character were inseparable from their efforts to sustain viable mountain economies.

Friday 4 / 9 / 2026
Palazzo Turconi (T0.05)

9.30–11.30 **Panel III.**
Nature conservation from a postcolonial perspective
Moderator: **Bernhard Schär** (UniDistance)

The rise of the colonial state. Local achievements of a comprehensive project to "protect" the mountains of Réunion in the second half of the 19th century
Romain Cauliez

This paper sets out to analyse the forms of colonisation by the French state of the mountainous territories of Réunion Island in the mid-19th century. While the signs of this growing administrative control over the highlands are widely visible–a new Forestry Code, systematic surveillance, sanctions, trails and roads, thermal springs, acclimatisation–no work has focused on the global dimension of this localised state movement. The aim, therefore, is to demonstrate the transoceanic and transnational nature of the networks that enabled the concrete realisation of this enterprise in Réunion. The multiple forms that these flows take are highlighted: (i) the diversity of material and immaterial flows; (ii) the places, orientation and intensity of these flows between the colony and other territories; (iii) the local spatialisation of flows and consequently of power relations between the "Highs" and the "Lows"; finally, (iv) the binary nature of the flight regime inherent in (mountain) colonisation – a privileged mode of resistance for enslaved humans on the one hand, and the outflow of capital to the metropolis on the other. Such a monograph on the various manifestations of the colonial State in Réunion, in the decades following the abolition of slavery in 1848, reveals the principles and logic of the "protection" of the mountain environment–understood as a localised attempt to extend the state's growing influence. It also reveals the fundamentally global nature of this project, embedded in a network of actors and flows stretching from India to Madagascar, via the Parisian ministries and the Alpine valleys. In doing so, this paper highlights the specific nature of the "protection" of the Réunion mountains–and thus the coloniality of the powers implemented–but also the similarities in the governance of all the "vertical margins" of the French territory. Finally, while solo or roped climbing has already been the subject of in-depth studies, the theme of a State ascent into the mountains appears as a methodological framework allowing local projects of environmental "protection" to be reintegrated into globalised regimes of government and economic production.

Colonial Ordinance No. 2599 of July 17, 1950 and regulations governing the practice of forest grazing in the Bamboutos Mountains (Cameroon)
Merline Christile Tezembong- Songou

In the 19th century, the exploitation of natural resources was central to the French colonial project in Cameroon in general, and particularly in the Bamboutos Mountains, an area rich in pastures. To regulate the sustainable development of the natural environment, the French administration instituted the practice of forest grazing within the Bamboutos forest reserves. In a context of declining agricultural and pastoral activity and competition for the use of this resource, Colonial Ordinance No. 2599 of July 17, 1950, specified the conditions for exercising grazing and rangeland rights in this reserve. This paper aims to analyse the administrative provisions contained in this legislation in terms of environmental preservation in the Bamboutos Mountains. To achieve this, we used document analysis and fieldwork combined with structuralism. This allowed us to achieve the following results: the construction of plant fences around the different pastoral exploitation areas, the definition of the number of animals to be grazed taking into account the grazing capacities are the fruits of the colonial policy of conservation and maintenance of traditional landscapes on the Bamboutos mountains.

Encounters at High Altitude. The SSAF and the Relationship with the Himalayan Local Environment
Maurizio Raselli

Encounters at High Altitude: The Relationship between Swiss Mountaineers and the Local Workforce in the Himalayas - In 1939 and 1952, when members of the Swiss expeditions directed by the SSAF met the local workforce in the Himalaya region, two worlds met. On one side stood Switzerland, one of the main hubs of a world shaped by industrial modernity; on the other side, the Indian subcontinent was its periphery. This may be seen in the Swiss sources related to the expeditions, where roles, working conditions, salaries, and so on are but a reflection of such dynamics and of the gradient of modernity between the places. My paper analyses this relationship in more detail, attempting to measure some aspects of this encounter and the written and unwritten rules behind such meetings. However, the paper will also challenge simplistic notions that assume only two groups exist in this dynamic, and show that this was far from the case – with even the workforce from the subcontinent having different access to resources depending on their roles. The paper will try to express this relationship in quantifiable terms insofar as it can be done. Finally, the paper will attempt to place this relationship into the larger historical framework and argue that modernity – and access to it – is the key explanation behind such phenomena. The sources used relate to the SSAF's 1939 and 1952 expeditions and will focus mostly on André Roch's texts, although other documents will be studied as well, such as the contracts and the thoughts and points of view of other members and members of the local workforce.

A Case for Vernacular Environmentalism in the Eastern Lesser Himalayas: Co-Producing a Pluriversal Pedagogy from the Foothills
Aishwarya Bhattacharyya & Abdul Matin

Darjeeling – today celebrated for its tea estates and scenic allure – emerged in the mid-nineteenth century as a frontier of empire. Annexed by the British East India Company in 1835 from the Kingdom of Sikkim, the region was rapidly re-engineered through road building, plantation capitalism, and the militarised "hill-station" project that tied the Eastern Himalayas to global circuits of labour and leisure. Nepali migration to Darjeeling, actively encouraged to supply plantation labour and Gurkha regiments, produced a multi-ethnic highland society that was always simultaneously local and transnational. Within this mosaic, small groups of Nepali-speaking Muslims – descendants of traders, artisans, and caste-triggered converts who arrived from eastern Nepal and northern Bengal – occupy a distinctive position: religiously minoritised within a Hindu-Buddhist landscape and linguistically marginal within Bengal's language geography. Their environmental worlds, shaped by plantation labour, seasonal mobility, and precarious tenancy, have long been overshadowed in both nationalist and conservationist narratives of the Himalayas. This essay examines the emergence of a vernacular environmental pedagogy within the Darjeeling Hills Welfare Society (DHWS), led by this community. Drawing on five years of ethnographic collaboration, 2020–2025, we explore how local actors – workers, informal educators, and youth volunteers – translate lived experiences of landslides, deforestation, and human- animal conflict into an alternative ecological imagination. We further situate this inquiry within the longer intellectual history of "environment as pedagogy", tracing its movement from the instrumentalist developmental model that treats nature as a resource for state- planning, through the romantic-conservationist discourse inherited from colonial mountaineering, and the critical political ecology that exposes how capital and class mediate Himalayan vulnerability. We draw conceptually from the first and the third trajectories while extending them through Walter Mignolo's notion of pluriversality, which posits the coexistence of diverse knowledge traditions as an alternative to a single, universalised framework, and make a case for a fourth approach – a vernacular-decolonial or pluriversal approach – one that understands environment as a co-produced, relational process among diverse epistemologies rather than a single, universal knowledge system. Our work with DHWS grows from and contributes to this fourth lineage. Here, environmental knowledge is not imparted through formal curricula but enacted through everyday acts of care: reclaiming water channels, performing rituals of land remembrance, and narrating loss in local idioms. These practices form a vernacular environmentalism rooted in histories of displacement and faith-based ethics of repair. Reading these pedagogies within the longue durée of colonial

plantation economies and post-liberalisation urban expansion, the essay argues that Himalayan environmental thought – treated here as an evolving field – has moved from imperial governance to grassroots co-production. We argue that such dialogues instantiate Mignolo's pluriversity, connecting Darjeeling's Nepali- Muslim margins to wider anthropological insights from the Alps to the Andes. The discussion on findings highlights how under-resourced Lesser Himalayan actors, long excluded from conservation histories, craft their own ecological worldview and urge us to imagine the mountain otherwise.

Rural environmental governance in the Republic of Congo: the case of Mount Nabemba in the equatorial forest

Jovial Koua Oba online communication

This paper examines the issue of environmental governance in the Sangha department. Mount Nabemba is a mountain located in the far northwest of the Congo, in the vast equatorial forest. This mountain is rich in iron ore, gold, and other mineral deposits, and the intense pressure from economic activities has negative impacts on the environment. The Congo, like other developing countries, is a state with limited budgetary resources and a strong dependence on resource rents. Forest resources constitute a significant portion of its tax revenue and contribute approximately 5% to the national GDP. The Sangha department, located more than 800 km north of Brazzaville, has become a goldmine for (Chinese) mining companies over the past 15 years. This gold rush is severely straining the application of the mining code and community rights, resulting in the deterioration of forest cover and waterways, and the appropriation of land belonging to the indigenous populations of surrounding villages. In terms of governance, the State of Congo created a ministry dedicated to the environment, sustainable development, and the Congo Basin by decree no. 2023–1756 of November 17. In addition, there is decree no. 33–2023 concerning the sustainable management of the environment in the Republic of Congo. These documents place particular emphasis on risk prevention, combating all forms of pollution and nuisances, the sustainable management of natural resources, especially in mountainous areas, biodiversity, and cultural and historical heritage, and improving the living conditions of the population while respecting the ecological balance. Despite the existence of a substantial legal framework, Mount Nabemba is on the brink of ecological disaster. Alongside the failure to comply with environmental impact assessment procedures, there is also a disregard for agreements with mining companies. Two methodological approaches were used in this study: a literature review and field research. The passivity and complacency of decentralised government agencies and the State in general regarding the management of natural resources, particularly mineral exploitation, lead to unregulated mining that disregards best practices. The study recommends the involvement of local communities in governance and fair compensation for land loss. To achieve these goals, the establishment of community monitoring committees, a strengthened State presence on the ground, and the use of legal and media advocacy to compel mining companies to respect environmental and human balances should be encouraged.

1.30–3.30 pm **Panel IV.**
The many aspects of mountain conservation
Moderator: **Nelly Valsangiacomo** (University of Lausanne)

Mountain Film Festivals as space for environmental debate: the cases of Les Diablerets and Banff (1964–2002)

Lucia Leoni

This paper examines how mountain film festivals became important platforms for the circulation of environmental discourse from the 1970s onward. While concerns about environmental protection within the mountaineering community emerged earlier in the twentieth century – notably through initiatives led by the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) and debates

surrounding sustainable development in the Alps – film festivals offered a distinctive cultural space in which these concerns could be communicated to broad and diverse audiences. Bringing together mountaineers, local communities, tourists, filmmakers, and urban spectators, mountain film festivals acted as mediators between environmental activism, cultural production, and public awareness. Focusing on two case studies – the Les Diablerets International Alpine Film Festival (FIFAD) in Switzerland and the Banff Mountain Film Festival in Canada — the paper explores the transnational circulation of environmental ideas and representations within mountain cultures. Both festivals introduced categories dedicated to environmental protection almost simultaneously: Les Diablerets in 1974 and Banff in 1978. In Les Diablerets, this evolution culminated in the Festival's renaming as the "International Alpine and Environmental Film Festival" in 1979, reflecting the growing prominence of ecological concerns within mountain-related cultural institutions. The parallel development of these festivals raises questions about the actors, institutions, and networks that shaped environmental discourse in mountain regions during the late twentieth century. Drawing on archival materials, festival programmes, press releases, and award-winning films, the paper investigates how environmental protection was defined and represented between 1974 and 2002. Particular attention is paid to the first awarded films in these categories – *Cabane de Rondins* (FIFAD, 1977) and *Do It With Joy* (Banff, 1978) – in order to analyse the narratives, aesthetics, and values associated with mountain conservation. The study also examines how these representations evolved in relation to changing environmental awareness and differing national contexts. By comparing these two festivals, the paper argues that mountain film festivals played a significant role in shaping public perceptions of environmental protection and sustainability. More broadly, it demonstrates how cultural events served as key sites for the transnational exchange of ecological ideas, contributing to the development of environmental awareness within global mountain cultures in the late twentieth century.

When noise becomes law: The establishment of a nature protection commission within the Swiss Alpine Club (1963–1975)

Noah Varrin

In the flourishing post-war economic climate, industrial Switzerland was fuelled by a productivist optimism. A growth fuelled by the mountains: dams, cable cars, roads, and ski resorts reshaped the Alpine landscape. Paradoxically, the more a society transforms its environment, the more it develops a sensitivity to its preservation. From the 1960s onward, nature conservation emerged as a major political issue. Article 24*sexies* of the Federal Constitution (1962) attests to this. Three associations – the Swiss League for Nature Protection (LSPN), the Heimatschutz (local heritage protection organisation), and the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) – established an inventory of sites of national importance. This initiative was part of the SAC's gradual institutionalisation as an environmental actor. In 1962, the Delegates' Assembly in Montreux marked a turning point: the Association's decisions went far beyond the Club's own agenda and crystallised a public debate surrounding recreational aviation in the high mountains. This controversy led to the creation, in October 1962, of a Nature Conservation Commission. Tasked with coordinating positions on development projects, it revealed the tension between the SAC's evolving focus on tourism and its mission as guardian of Alpine heritage. This contribution traces the origins and challenges of this commission (1962–1972), analysing its content and structure, as well as the debates it sparked between proponents of development and those of conservation. Beyond aviation and noise, the commission took a stance on major issues: hydroelectric power, ski lifts, and glacial management. Its evolution reveals a shift from preservationist or idealist positions toward an integrated planning approach, often referred to as conservationist. Between 1966 and 1968, it developed a master plan distinguishing between "soft" and "mass" tourism zones, which subsequently shaped federal legislation.

This study aims to assess the influence of the Swiss Alpine Club on federal legislation, particularly the decree of March 17, 1972, on land-use planning, and contributes to understanding the role of alpine associations in the politicisation of nature in post-war Switzerland. Methodologically, it draws on the archives of the SAC Central Committee (Bern Bourgeoisie Library), the minutes of the Commission, and internal correspondence, cross-referenced with general and specialised press articles.

Cleaning up the Alps. "Mountain" initiatives "Clean" from the CAS to the founding of the Summit Foundation, the tortuous path of addressing waste in the mountains (1970s to the present day)

Philippe Vonnard

"It is up to mountaineers to set an example." This sentence, taken from Bulletin No. 55 (August 1973) of the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA), reflects a paradigm shift: in the wake of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972), the UIAA and some alpine clubs (including the Swiss Alpine Club) want to position themselves as leading collective actors in mountain protection. Indeed, following the International Year of Mountains, the first mountain cleanups were organised by alpine clubs, most notably the Swiss Alpine Club. However, the problem continued to grow worse over the following decades, and other civil society actors took an interest and attempted to address it by proposing solutions. This was the case with the Summit Foundation, an organisation founded in the early 2000s, whose explicit goal was to collect waste in the mountains and raise public awareness of this issue. Our contribution will begin by revisiting the recognition of waste as a problem in the early 1970s, then by updating the initial actions of the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) (and some local chapters) on this issue. We will then examine the gradual arrival of other actors on the scene. The creation of the Summit Foundation will thus allow us to consider the potential obstacles to managing this problem, and more broadly, the ambivalence that existed within the SAC regarding the protection of mountain nature in the last third of the 20th century. This research is based on the archives of the central section of the CAS, the Geneva and Diablerets sections, the Summit Foundation, as well as some semi-structured interviews with actors in the process.

From volcanology to politics: H. Tazieff's multifaceted and ambivalent commitment to mountain preservation (1970s–1990s)

Arthur Malé

The phrase used in the title refers to the original slogan of the international association Mountain Wilderness. Founded in 1987 by a group of mountaineers, this organisation conducts awareness campaigns aimed at protecting mountain areas. Its symbolic patronage by Everest conquerors Edmund Hillary and John Hunt ensures its global visibility and credibility. Volcanologist Haroun Tazieff is the head of the French branch. Acting to protect nature by standardising uses and delimiting areas as "natural parks" seems intuitively like common sense. However, this perspective on mountains is not neutral and stems from beliefs that have acquired the force of self-evidence by establishing preferential uses. This presentation is structured around two questions: 1) What is the political line adopted by Mountain Wilderness regarding mountain conservation? 2) How can the adoption of this perspective be explained? By analysing unpublished sources from Haroun Tazieff's private archives, containing details of Mountain Wilderness's early actions and correspondence between members of the management committee, this study aims to understand the association's policies in light of the trajectory of one of its representatives. This story, told from the ground up, sheds light on the thought patterns that guide mountain protection efforts. From its name, which incorporates the concept of wilderness, to the minimalist logo designed to convey the image of a sacred place, the association pursues a preservationist policy. The conservation strategy adopted through the designation of "natural parks" raises questions about an ambiguity surrounding the balance between protection and exploitation. On the one hand, the aim is to manage tourist flows while maximising profits; on the other, to minimise impacts by regulating uses. This programmatic approach reflects the vision of the actors sitting on the decision-making bodies. They project their ideas while simultaneously mobilising their networks to lend more weight to their actions. In this sense, H. Tazieff's trajectory and involvement provide a privileged vantage point from which to study these elusive dynamics. His career path — prospecting engineer in Congo, volcanologist, expert on the High Committee for the Environment, etc. — led him to capitalise on a range of resources and support that could be mobilised, from industry to the political world.

Speakers' Short Biographies
(in alphabetical order)

Audrey Azar is a graduate assistant in art history at the Centre for Historical Cultural Studies (SHC) at the University of Lausanne. Her dissertation is entitled: "Uses of Photography and the Construction of Alpine Heritage: The Case of the Photographic Albums of the Geneva Section of the Swiss Alpine Club (1865–1960)." It is supervised by Olivier Lugon (Main thesis supervisor, University of Lausanne) and Jérôme David (Second thesis supervisor, University of Geneva).

Aishwarya Bhattacharyya is a co-grantee at the Dahdaleh Institute of Global Health Research, York University, Toronto, Canada. She holds a PhD in Political Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

Simona Boscani Leoni is Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Lausanne. She holds a PhD from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and a Habilitation from the University of Bern. She has held research and teaching positions at several universities in Switzerland, Italy, Germany and France. Her research interests include medieval social and religious history, the early modern history of knowledge and rural and environmental history. Her latest book is: *Interconnected Worlds: Johann Jakob Scheuchzer and the Scientific Discovery of the Alps (1500–1730)*. Rome: Viella, 2026. Open access : https://doi.org/10.52056/9791257011314.

Romain Cauliez is a doctoral candidate in Political Science and Historical Anthropology at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS). Affiliated to the European Centre for Sociology and Political Science (CESSP), and an associate researcher at the Research Laboratory on Creole and Francophone Spaces (LCF – University of Reunion Island), he works on the state formation of the peripheral mountain regions of the French territory in the 19th century and the various forms of negotiation, resistance and avoidance that took place there.

Caterina Franco is an architect and architectural historian. Since 2025, she has been leading an SNSF *Ambizione* project within the EPFL's Lab-U, entitled "An Alpine Modernity? Plans, Constructions, Remains, 1929–1975. Towards an Architectural and Environmental History of High Mountain Tourism, from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean." She is an associate researcher at LabisAlp (Mendrisio Academy of Architecture).

Steve Hagimont is Assistant Professor and researcher in Environmental History at Sciences Po Toulouse. He works on the history of tourism, nature conservation, and more generally, on public policies for development, planning, and nature protection in rural and mountain areas. After a doctoral thesis on the history of tourism in the French and Spanish Pyrenees between the late 18th and late 20th century, his current research focuses on the history of winter sports development in the French mountains during the 20th century. He tries to adopt a systemic approach, connecting the environment with social and political organisations.

Claude Hauser is Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Fribourg. Specialising in the history of intellectuals and the history of international cultural relations, particularly in the field of Francophone studies, he has been President of the International Association for Quebec Studies since 2018. He is also co-director of the Swiss Centre for Quebec and Francophone Studies, which he founded in 2010. He currently directs the SNSF-funded project "The Globalization of the Alps: From Landscape to Environment."

Fynn Holm is Junior Professor at the University of Tübingen. He specialises in Japanese Studies and Environmental History. *His first book, The Gods of the Sea: Whales and Coastal Communities in Northeast Japan, c. 1600–2019*, was published in 2023 by Cambridge University Press. He is currently

the Principal Investigator of the Emmy Noether Research Group 'The Japanese Alpine Empire: A Transnational Environmental History of Japan's "Alpine" Landscapes.'

Sherief Fitz is a PhD candidate at the Department of Japanese Studies, University of Tübingen and a member of the project "The Japanese Alpine Empire". His area of research covers the social and cultural history of Modern Japan. Currently, he examines the exchanges between Japan and European Alpine countries, with a special interest in how the Japanese Alps were transformed into a curated, "non-Japanese" experience since the Postwar Period.

Tom Jones is Professor of Sustainability & Tourism at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in Beppu, SW Japan. His research focuses on Sustainability and Human Geography. After completing his PhD at the University of Tokyo, Tom carried out visitor surveys in national parks such as the North Japan Alps and world heritage sites such as Mt Fuji and Kinabalu.

Sebastian Kasper has worked in various positions at the Deutsches Museum since 2018. He is currently part of a team developing a new exhibition on the electrical energy system. The exhibition concept focuses on the energy system as the result of a complex social negotiation process. His doctoral research on protest movements of the 1970s also centred on the debate surrounding the design of energy production.

Michał Kuryłowicz – with a PhD in Political Science, he is a member of the Department of Eurasian Studies (Jagiellonian University, Kraków), and the author of the monograph "Polityka zagraniczna Uzbekistanu wobec Rosji". His research areas include the teaching of history and the politics of memory in the post-Soviet space, the politicisation of mountaineering in Poland and in the countries of the former USSR.

Lucia Leoni is a teaching assistant at UniDistance Suisse and a PhD student in contemporary history at the University of Fribourg, where she is writing a dissertation on the evolution of mountain films and film festivals in the Swiss Alps and the Canadian Rockies. Her areas of interest include environmental history, gender history, the history of audiovisual media, and the history of mountaineering.

Jeroen Derkinderen Lombeyda studied history at the VUB in Brussels and obtained a doctorate from the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito campus, in 2025. His doctoral thesis focused on the history of Ecuadorian Andeanism in the second half of the 20th century, and his research centres on the social, environmental, and interconnected dimensions of this practice. Since 2025, he has been an editor of the journal *Huellas Andinas*, devoted to contemporary Andean studies.

Luigi Lorenzetti is a Full Professor affiliated to the Accademia di Architettura (USI), Mendrisio, where he heads the *Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi*. He is a member of the scientific committee of the International Association for the History of the Alps. His research focuses on the economic, social and territorial history of the Alpine world between the 18th and the 20th century.

Arthur Malé is a graduate of the École Normale Supérieure and holds a teaching qualification in Physical Education and Sport. He is writing a thesis on the making of sporting explorers through the personalities of Jacques-Yves Cousteau, Paul-Émile Victor, and Haroun Tazieff. His research focuses on sports and leisure activities, technological innovations, and environmental history, all viewed through the lens of adventure.

Abdul Matin is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University in Kolkata. He has a PhD in Political Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Previously, he has held a DAAD visiting Fellowship at the Center for Modern Indian Studies, University of Gottingen, Germany.

Jovial Koua Oba holds a PhD in Human Geography. He is a lecturer and researcher in the Geography Department at Maren Ngouabi University in Brazzaville. He is a member of the Laboratory of Geography, Environment and Planning (LAGEA). He currently serves as Director of Research and Cooperation at the National Center for Training in Statistics, Demography and Planning (CNFSDP).

Sabine Pitteloud is an assistant professor of contemporary history at UniDistance Switzerland. Her research focuses on the political history of capitalism. She currently directs the SNSF project "Organized Business and Environmental Governance in Western Europe [1945–1995]." A former Newcomen Fellow at Harvard Business School and lecturer at the University of Geneva, she has also been a visiting scholar at Humboldt University of Berlin, the New School for Social Research in New York, and the University of Glasgow. Her recent publications include *Swiss Multinationals in the Political Arena (1942–1993)* (Droz, 2022), *Environmental Regulation and the History of Capitalism* (Routledge, 2025, with Sandra Bott and Janick Schaufelbuehl) and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of Multinationals and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2026, co-edited with Geoffrey Jones).

Grégory Quin, a historian, is a lecturer and researcher at the Institute of Sport Sciences, University of Lausanne. He currently co-directs the Interdisciplinary Mountain Research Centre (CIRM) and has contributed to developing the "The Making of National Sports" project between 2019 and 2023, creating a database of the first Swiss sporting elites at the turn of the 20th century. He is also co-editor of the journal *Les Sports Modernes*.

Antje Reppe, MA, studied literature, cultural studies, and history at the Dresden University of Technology. Since 2017, she has worked at the Institute for Saxon History and Folklore (ISGV) in Dresden, where she currently manages the advisory and research centre for intangible cultural heritage in Saxony. In addition to her work focusing on cultural heritage, her research at the Dresden University of Technology explores the construction and staging of "home" through cultural expressions.

Noé Varrin holds a Master of Arts in History and Sport from the University of Neuchâtel, as well as a Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) in Physical Education and History. He is a graduate assistant at the Institute of Sport Sciences, University of Lausanne and is currently writing a doctoral thesis in history, focusing on the invention of nature, particularly in the Alpine context, by mountaineering federations in Switzerland.

Maurizio Raselli is a PhD student at the University of Fribourg. His research, based on the case study of André Roch, investigates how Switzerland influenced the modernisation and globalisation of mountain areas worldwide. His research focuses primarily on the history of modernity and of development.

Bernhard C. Schär is a professor of history at Unidistance Switzerland. His research focuses on the world history of Europe and Switzerland. His latest publication, co-authored with Amal Shahid, is entitled: “Financing Mission Societies, Capitalizing Protestantism. A trans-imperial History”, *Journal of Global History*, 2026 (forthcoming).

Laurent Tissot is Professor Emeritus of Contemporary History at the University of Neuchâtel (2006–2018). President of the Swiss Society for Economic and Social History (2005–2009). Member of the FNRS Research Council (2007–2015). Treasurer of the International Committee for Historical Sciences (2008–2018) and member of the bureau of the International Committee for Philosophy and Human Sciences (2013–2020).

Giulio Ongaro is Associate Professor of Economic History at the University of Milano-Bicocca. He obtained his PhD in Economic History at the University of Verona, with a dissertation on the construction and management of the Venetian military structure and its effects on local economies. His research focuses on the relationship between economic inequality, the management of local finances, and the inclusiveness of political institutions in the early modern period, as well as on the management of

natural resources. More broadly, his interests range from early modern rural history to the history of agriculture and labour history.

Nelly Valsangiacomo is Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Lausanne. Her latest research work has focused on sounds and soundscapes as well as on the acoustic and sensory history of Alpine landscapes.

Philippe Vonnard holds a doctorate from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Lausanne. Currently a Senior SNSF Researcher in the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Fribourg (UNIFR) and a Lecturer at the Institute of Sport Sciences, University of Lausanne (ISSUL), his research focuses on the internationalisation of sports, the socio-history of sports, leisure and tourism in Switzerland and the environmental history of the Alpine region from a global perspective (research which is part of the preparation of a *Habilitation* Thesis at UNIFR).

Merline Christile Tezembong-Songou specialises in economic, social, and environmental history. In 2021, she was awarded a PhD in History on "Agrarian Practices and Sustainable Development in Western Cameroon (19th–20th Centuries)", from the University of Dschang. She is the author of several scientific publications in the field.

Michael Wedekind – After attending school in his birthplace of Bremen and completing his military service, he studied History, Romance languages and literatures, and Education in Münster/Westphalia, Perugia, and Bologna. After passing the state examination, he earned a doctorate in Modern and Contemporary History in Münster, with a study on German occupation policies in Italy between 1943 and 1945. Following his postdoctoral studies, again in Münster, he worked successively as a research assistant at the Universities of Trento, Münster, Vienna, and finally at the Central Institute for Art History in Munich. He has been a visiting scholar at the Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento and visiting professor at the Universities of Bucharest and Trento.