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A Transdisciplinary Approach To Respond To Sustainability Challenges In Mountains: The Experience Of The Perce-Neige Collective In Gresse-En-Vercors, French Alps

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► To cite this version:

Enora Bruley, Carine Pachoud, Julia Grosinger, Anne-Sophie Crepeau, Emmanuel Salim, et al.. A Transdisciplinary Approach To Respond To Sustainability Challenges In Mountains: The Experience Of The Perce-Neige Collective In Gresse-En-Vercors, French Alps. 2023. hal-03930407

HAL Id: hal-03930407

<https://hal.science/hal-03930407v1>

Preprint submitted on 3 Feb 2023

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Submitted Abstract

ID IMC22-FSAbstr- 596

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Organisations	1: IGE - CNRS, France 2: PACTE - Labex ITTEM, France 3: PACTE, France 4: EDYTEM - USMB, France 5: IGD - UNIL, Switzerland 6: PACTE - CERMOSEM - UGA, France
Country	France
Region	Western Europe
Title	A Transdisciplinary Approach To Respond To Sustainability Challenges In Mountains: The Experience Of The Perce-Neige Collective In Gresse-En-Vercors, French Alps.
Keywords	Transdisciplinary, Knowledge Co-Production, Early-Career Researcher, Wicked Problem, French Alps.
Type	List Of Focus Session
Focus Session ID	02

Abstract

Looking at the unprecedented speed of global changes, sustainability science has to rethink the traditional way of doing research and how scientific findings can be translated rapidly into action. Transdisciplinary approaches provide useful insight into how science can interact with society in finding meaningful answers to wicked problems. In this context, the case of mountain social-ecological systems is particularly relevant because they are highly vulnerable to global change and are struggling to move towards sustainability.

The research collective Perce-Neige strives to tackle these challenges and apply novel transdisciplinary methodologies in mountain regions. It considers itself as a genuine society-science interface. The group is composed of early-career researchers coming from various disciplines (from environmental and social sciences) working on sustainable transitions in mountains.

We have developed a particular methodology that we propose to discuss here. During a one-week research residency, we conducted transdisciplinary research with the inhabitants and local institutions of the municipality of Gresse-en-Vercors in the French Alps to facilitate the development of a common vision and initiate collective thinking for a sustainable future of the region. During this week, participants (researchers and non-researchers) were able to get to know each other through different interfaces facilitating exchange, reflection and co-construction (collective walk, individual interviews, collective workshops, informal daily exchanges). The objective for the 11 early-career researchers from 8 different disciplines was to get the inhabitants to express the challenges, needs and solutions of the region in order to define guidelines for a future vision.

We present here the benefits of such a method for acculturating early-career researchers to transdisciplinary research, and a first step in framing problems and reflecting on actions for a sustainable future of the region. It allows us to capture different perspectives on issues in a region that may cause conflicts, and then to discuss them in order to identify adaptation needs and solutions. Moreover, from an action based angle, this approach introduces new dynamics among local actors e.g. closer collaboration of actors which have not been knowing each other prior to this research. From an institutional point of view, scientific research also should consider itself as part of daily life of society and not acting in its own echo chamber, thus transdisciplinary approaches can offset this possible isolation of real world situations.