



CREATION

March 2009

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Transition from overexploitation of the mountain environment to the progressive abandon of the whole set of agricultural, forestry, pastoral and industrial activities.

DISRUPTING EVENT

In 2003, industrial activity stopped - including the Pechiney alumina plant, in a context of declining agro-pastoral activities.

KEY TOPICS

- Global change and biodiversity dynamics
- Agro-pastoral evolution and natural heritage
- Dynamics of human occupation and new economic and cultural (tourism) activities
- Water resources
- Sustainable development



TERRITORY

The Pyrenees Human-Environment Observatory works on a mountain region that has been subject to extensive human abandonment since the second half of the 20th century. The study area covers the high valley of *Vicdessos* in *Ariège*, and the gaves valleys in the *Hautes-Pyrénées* department from the heart of the valleys to the peaks that soar to altitudes of over 3,000 m (19,685 ft). Subject to intense pressure from mining, metallurgy and agro-pastoral activities for more than a millennium, these valleys are today subject to a process of abandonment that is marked by the definitive end of all industrial activity and by the reorientation of practices with the development of tourism.



SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

The transition between two types of land use and occupation of space in the sensitive mountain environment creates a context of socio-ecological breakdown. This transition combines in the same place ancient legacies (pollution, land degradation, etc.), with new natural dynamics and new contemporary economic practices. In this context, the OHM, using analysis of long term data combined with scenario-building focuses on five main phenomena impacting the territory and the environment: biodiversity dynamics in an environment hugely transformed by people, and affected by global warming; agro-pastoralism, which is tending to disappear despite its heritage value; urban creep, which is overrunning the valleys and leading to new socio-economic dynamics; water resources, which bring income from hydroelectricity, but with declining snowfall and repeated droughts; tourism development vs. conservation of the natural and cultural heritage.



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