

## First European Meeting on Mountain Huts

### Context

Mountain touring tourism (excursion, hiking and alpinism) is deeply international. In fact, the European mountains are, mostly transborder areas (it is common that a mountain cross several countries, like the Via Alpina for example) and the users are of various nationalities.

In France, the foreign users represent more than 30 % of the total mountain users. They make over night stay in altitude buildings called mountain huts and expect to find there good quality accommodations and a homogeneous level.

We notice that it is not always like that. Neither the comfort of buildings, neither the kind of services, nor the opening dates (it is principally a summer tourism even if it becomes little by little also a winter tourism) are not harmonized. Furthermore, despite of the efforts of the European Union in terms of regulation, it appears that each State applies different rules for mountain huts, or some States did not adopt specific rules on this topic, whereas these constructions are located in areas which are faced to strong natural and environmental pressures.

Besides, the EU decreed the freedom of the work on its territory but the working conditions of the hut keepers are different from State to States. An effort of harmonization of the sporting occupations of mountain at the European level is growing, but does not concern the hut keepers.

The number of mountain huts in the EU is very difficult to assess because of the definitions. But it could be around 2000 and their direct and indirect economic weight is often underestimated. Their impact in terms of image is very important. Without mountain huts, mountain is inhuman ...

In France, we may count approximately 300 managed mountain huts. A national report was established in 2000. For some years, on the initiative of the State and the local authorities, important efforts were made in order to modernize the mountain huts park (through Interregional Agreements of Massif), to organize the profession of hut keepers (creation of a repository and a diploma adopted in Spain), to precise the rules (decree of 22/3/07). European dimension is indispensable in order to go on.

The first Franco-Spanish seminar took place in November 2007 in Foix (Ariège –Pyrenees) in November 2007, and was dedicated to the training of the hut keepers in France and in Spain. The objective of this meeting was the harmonization of the hut keepers' profession in these two countries.

**It is now necessary to speak broader about the investigations in the other European countries related to the current reflex ions about the development of an European mountain policy. It seems important to understand how the mountain huts and their actors can be the motors of an active sustainable development policy of the European mountain in its various dimensions : environmental (exemplarity of constructions and management, environmental education in mountain, economic (creation of economic flows besides the ski resorts,...) and social (valorization of hut keepers' profession, great accessibility to the mountain). It is the general purpose of the "European Meeting on Mountain Huts" that ODIT FRANCE agreed to organize, according to the wishes of the main representatives of the owners of mountain huts, managers, hut keepers and organizations, the elected representatives and administrations.**

### **Objectives of the meeting**

In the beginning it will offer a panorama of mountain huts in Europe (definitions, rules, financing, nature of buildings, equipments and services, management, training of the hut keepers) realized by ODIT France and after, thanks to the involving of various European actors, it has for objective.

- to remind the functions and some images of mountain huts
- to draw up a " panorama of mountain huts " in the European Union, to expose the various conceptions of the notion of mountain hut and analyze the differences and the convergences
- for sharing experiences, even harmonization and networking of mountain huts, on the various fields linked to the sustainable development (environmental, economic, social) which can lead to programs of Community actions, and being integrated in the broader European issues on mountains.

### **Contents of meeting**

A panorama of mountain huts in various countries and mountains ranges of Europe will be drawn up and delivered to the participants.

The conference itself will be preceded by a visit of two close mountain huts in order to concretize the discussions..

The conference will last 2 days:

- The first day will be dedicated to :
  - On the one hand, a presentation of the functions and images of mountain huts
  - On the other hand, a panorama of the current place of mountain huts in the different countries and mountains ranges of the EU (Pyrenees, Alps, Carpathians, Scandinavia) in form of synopsis followed by a roundtable in order to understand the design of mountain huts and the behaviours of the users according to the countries and mountains ranges.
- The second day will be dedicated to
  - Morning : analysis of the mountain huts position through the concept of sustainable development of mountains
  - Afternoon : suggestions for initiatives, exchanges and mountain huts development within a mountain policy in the European States and for the European Union.

- At the same time, near the Congress Center, will be hold some stands showing various organizations about mountain huts.
- ODIT France will publish a “Conference report” constituting a “white book” of mountain huts in Europe.

## **Participants**

The target public of this European meeting on Mountain Huts is in particular :

- the elected representatives of the mountains areas
- the European administrations (European Commission, Countries, Regions, ... ) concerned by mountain tourism,
- the main mountaineering users associations
- the interested professional organizations: mainly the owners, the managers and the hut keepers,
- the training and normalization companies,
- the specific companies.

## **Organisation**

ODIT FRANCE will organize this meeting which will take place in **the CAES Paul Langevin in Aussois (73) on May 17,18 and 19 2009**, a mountain resort in the middle of the Vanoise National Park. This place can be reached easily by train or by car from France or Italy.

ODIT FRANCE wishes to make arrangements in the organization of this meeting being in line, concretely, with the criteria of sustainable development.

Will be associated to this event more particularly:

- French Government (D.I.A.C.T = Interdepartmental Delegation for Land Settlement and Competitiveness of the Territories / M.E.D.D.A.T. = Ministry for Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Land Settlement, ...)
- Regional Councils (Rhône-Alpes and Alps-Provence-Côte d’Azur), departments (Savoy, ...) and public institutions of Maurienne
- A.E.E.M. (European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain) and A.N.E.M. (National Association of Elected Representatives of Mountain)
- Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention
- Vanoise National Park
- F.F.C.A.M. = French Federation of Alpine Clubs and Mountain / S.N.G.R = National Union of Hut keepers / S.N.A.M. = National Union of Mountain Guides, ...

**The meeting languages will be French and English (simultaneous translation)**