

DANIELE PEANO (*), MARTA CHIARLE (**) & JOST VON HARDENBERG (***)

A MINIMAL MODEL APPROACH FOR GLACIER LENGTH MODELING IN THE WESTERN ITALIAN ALPS

ABSTRACT: PEANO D., CHIARLE M. & VON HARDENBERG J., *A minimal model approach for glacier length modeling in the Western Italian Alps*. (IT ISSN 0391-9838, 2016)

We study the response of a set of glaciers in the Western Italian Alps to climate variations using a minimal glacier modeling approach, first introduced by Oerlemans. The mathematical models are forced over the period 1959-2009, using temperature and precipitation recorded by a dense network of meteorological stations, and we find a good match between the observed and modeled glacier length dynamics, especially for the two glaciers that have observed surface mass balance, i.e. Ciardoney and Grand Etrèt, and, in absence of observed surface mass balance, for small glaciers, such as Basei, Bessanese, and Capra. Forcing the model with future projections from a state-of-the-art global climate model in the RCP 4.5 and RCP 8.5 scenarios, we show how this approach can be used to obtain a first estimate for the future evolution of these glaciers length and we discuss the related uncertainties.

KEY WORDS: Minimal glacier model, Western Italian Alps, Surface mass balance, Glaciers length reconstruction.

RIASSUNTO: PEANO D., CHIARLE M. & VON HARDENBERG J., *Un approccio con un modello minimale per la modellazione della lunghezza dei ghiacciai nelle Alpi Occidentali Italiane* (IT ISSN 0391-9838, 2016)

È stata studiata la risposta di un gruppo di ghiacciai delle Alpi Italiane Occidentali alle variazioni climatiche per mezzo di un modello

(*) IRPI-CNR, Torino, Italy, now at Ca' Foscari University, Venice, Italy and CMCC, Bologna, Italy

(**) IRPI-CNR, Torino, Italy

(***) ISAC-CNR, Torino, Italy

Corresponding author: daniele.peano@cmcc.it

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minimale, introdotto per primo da Oerlemans. Questo modello matematico è stato forzato sul periodo 1959-2009, usando temperature e precipitazioni registrate da un'ampia rete di stazioni meteorologiche. Questa operazione ha permesso di trovare un buon riscontro tra la dinamica delle variazioni in lunghezza dei ghiacciai modellata e quella documentata dagli operatori glaciologici. Tale riscontro è particolarmente buono per i due ghiacciai per i quali si dispongono di misure di bilancio di massa superficiale, i.e. Ciardoney e Grand Etrèt, e, in assenza di dati di bilancio di massa, per ghiacciai di piccole dimensioni, quali Basei, Bessanese e Capra. Forzando il modello con proiezioni future simulate da un modello di clima globale allo stato-dell'arte sotto gli scenari RCP 4.5 e RCP 8.5, è stato mostrato come questo approccio possa essere usato per ottenere una prima stima dell'evoluzione futura della lunghezza di questi ghiacciai, e ne sono state discusse le incertezze.

TERMINI CHIAVE: Modello minimale di ghiacciai, Alpi Italiane Occidentali, Bilancio di massa superficiale, Ricostruzione della lunghezza dei ghiacciai.

INTRODUCTION

Climatic variations in mountain areas can lead to important environmental hazards such as landslides and floods (e.g. Deline & *alii*, 2012; Chiarle & Mortara, 2008; Stoffel & Huggel, 2012) or to changes in water availability and quality (e.g. Braun & *alii*, 2000; Viviroli & *alii*, 2011; Beniston, 2012). Mountain environments may respond strongly to climate change and different aspects of mountain regions respond to ongoing climate fluctuations; for example, the surface air temperature increase in the 20th century in the Alps has been twice the global average (Brunetti & *alii*, 2006). Alpine glaciers may present a strong and rapid reaction to climate oscillations (e.g. Nesje & Dahl, 2000; Bonanno & *alii*, 2013).

The Alpine region is characterized by an abundance of glaciers (Zemp & *alii*, 2008), but only a few of them are well studied. Time series of frontal variations are the most frequently available data. The response of glaciers to climate forcing is determined both by their geometry and