



**SWISS POLAR
INSTITUTE**

Annual Report 2024

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SWISS POLAR
INSTITUTE

Annual Report 2024

Foreword

In 2024, oceans reached unprecedented high temperatures, compromising their capability to absorb excess heat. More than 130 countries also experienced soaring temperature records, marking another year of bad news for global climate, polar regions and, indeed, our mountain glaciers.

The same year saw the announcement of ambitious international initiatives to accelerate and coordinate research in polar regions: the adoption of the UN's Decade of Action for Cryospheric Sciences (2025–2034); the preparation of the Antarctica InSync campaigns; and plans for the fifth International Polar Year (2032–2033) are all testimonies to this urgency. The Swiss Polar Institute (SPI) will ensure that Swiss science can contribute to these crucial global endeavours, thanks to our extensive network built through bilateral agreements and project collaborations.

Following the process initiated in 2023, SPI implemented concrete actions to measure and reduce carbon emissions of polar and high-altitude research. As Switzerland does not operate stations and large polar infrastructure, SPI chose to develop and embed methodologies into its funding instruments to help the scientific community make informed decisions for their fieldwork, stimulate synergies among the research groups and with local communities, and incentivise data sharing. We will pursue the journey towards greater sustainability of polar research in the years to come, in conversation with the scientific community.

True to its core mission, SPI continues to prioritise the funding of new programmes and creating unique access opportunities. In 2024, the two SPI Flagship programmes and more than 50 projects led successful data-collection campaigns in the field.

To facilitate the understanding and impact of polar science projects, the SPI has continued to invest in communication and outreach activities with museums, schools and science festivals. The number of students following Swiss Polar Class throughout Switzerland skyrocketed. For five months, 393 classes across 25 cantons completed fortnightly science-themed activities and followed live updates from Swiss skipper Oliver Heer racing in the Vendée Globe. Meeting the rising demand for scientific content tailored for non-specialist audiences is one of our priorities for 2025.

To conclude the year, we are delighted and proud that SPI's status as a research institution of national importance (Art. 15) was extended for the period 2025–2028. This is an important recognition of the work conducted by the Swiss research community and by the SPI team.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our institutional and philanthropic funders and partners for their trust and continued support, to the members of the Swiss and international polar communities who serve on our Advisory Board and evaluation panels, and to the Swiss polar research community members for their outstanding scientific contributions to the global effort to understand our planet's changing climate.

Prof. Martin Vetterli
Chair, SPI Foundation Board

Danièle Rod
Executive Director

3

Renewed partnerships
for 2025–2028

1

New signed agreement
with an international
polar operator

13

Swiss institutions
hosting SPI grantees

2

Million CHF
in research funded

59%

Early-career
scientist grantees

44%

Women
grantees

59

Ongoing
projects

34

Grants awarded
for new projects

901

Field days of SPI
Flagship Initiatives

520

Participants
in SPI events

4174

Children in Swiss Polar
Classes

25

Cantons involved in
Swiss Polar Class

Funding

From early-career to established scientists, the Swiss Polar Institute supports Swiss researchers with calls for proposals tailored to the specific needs of science conducted in polar regions. In 2024, particular emphasis was placed on addressing the environmental footprint of polar research.

In 2024, the annual calls for proposals of regular funding schemes were issued during the same timeframe as in past years, as continuity and regularity are crucial for planning scientific research and data acquisition in polar regions.

- SPI Flagship Initiatives
- Polar Access Fund
- SPI Exploratory Grants

The PolARTS tandems were selected and started their collaborations. The consortia of the two SPI Flagship Initiatives, PAMIR and GreenFjord, carried out their third field seasons in 2024 and will run until 2026.

- SPI Technogrants
- PolARTS
- Field and Summer Schools

Scientific expeditions are also part of SPI's portfolio of activities, and coordination of the Arctic Century expedition (2021) continued in 2024 to maximise the impact of analytical work of the collected data and samples.

- Konrad Steffen Grants

SPI Flagship Initiatives

SPI Flagship Initiatives are multi-year polar-region programmes that combine scientific and technological research from different disciplines and institutions. Funding provides temporary support infrastructure for Swiss-led polar research projects for coordination, logistics, safety, data management, and outreach.

The first two SPI Flagship Initiatives were launched in 2022 and will continue to run until 2026. In their third consecutive field season, scientists working in the two programmes spent close to 1000 days in the field collecting data specific to their various research clusters.

The programmes currently involve over 100 researchers from 12 Swiss institutions, along with a steadily growing number of international partners.

The **PAMIR Flagship Initiative** is an interdisciplinary programme that aims to characterise the past and current states of the Pamir Mountains cryosphere and its impacts on ecosystems, hazards and water resources. This Flagship, led by Martin Hoelzle (University of Fribourg), consists of six research clusters that aim to: (1) extract an ice core to unlock Central Asia's climate archive of the past millennium; (2) assess the distribution and state of permafrost; (3) measure the mass balance and accumulation of glaciers at a regional level; (4) establish the link between microbial adaptation and a rapidly changing cryosphere; (5) disentangle regional cryospheric hazards by understanding glaciological and permafrost drivers; and (6) unravel the lost history of Soviet cryospheric research in the Pamirs.

The **GreenFjord Flagship Initiative** aims to create process understanding of how climate change affects fjord ecosystems in southern Greenland and how perturbations propagate to biodiversity and livelihoods. This Flagship, led by Julia Schmale (EPFL), consists of six research clusters that: (1) investigate processes of glacier calving and iceberg export; (2) provide constraints on the delivery of nutrients and organic carbon through rivers and streams; (3) investigate the consequences of glacial retreat on nutrient dynamics and biological productivity within the fjord; (4) assess feedback mechanisms of fjord emissions on atmospheric composition and cloud formation; (5) evaluate the relationships between changing conditions in the fjords and biodiversity using eDNA; and (6) work with the local community to understand the effects of environmental changes on livelihoods.

The highly anticipated second SPI Flagship Initiatives call for proposals was officially announced to the Swiss polar science community during Swiss Polar Day in September 2024, and launched in February 2025.



PAMIR Flagship

In 2024, the PAMIR consortium successfully overcame some significant administrative challenges and completed its third field season in the mountains.

A reconnaissance expedition to the Kon Chukurbashi glacier cap confirmed the feasibility and scientific value of deep ice coring there. Drilling plans for 2025 are underway in close collaboration with ice-core scientists from Japan and University of Bern.

Excellent progress has also been made on work with the Swiss Data Science Center (SDSC) to implement machine-learning algorithms for regional permafrost mapping.

Public outreach via the exhibition “Walking on Rolling Stones” at the Klima Biennale in Vienna was a great success (see p. 11). Further engagement with the programme “Adventures of Science” enabled young women from Central Asia in the early stages of their studies to experience glaciology research firsthand.

More information:
pamir-project.ch

Fieldwork in the Pamir Mountains.
© 2024 Thomas Shaw, all rights reserved

GreenFjord Flagship

GreenFjord's third field season started in challenging conditions, with pack ice blocking access to some sites within the fjords. Despite the delay, scientists from all clusters accomplished their goals, with support from the crews of *RV Forel*, *RV Adolf Jensen* and *RV Sanna*, as well as staff from the Narsaq International Research Station.

The collaboration with SDSC is yielding fascinating results on southwestern Greenland's landscape evolution under climate change forcings. These analyses will be reported in an interdisciplinary overview paper.

Many consortium members were involved in outreach activities for the general public: taking Narsaq and Qaqortoq residents onboard the research vessels, giving workshops in Kujalleq municipality schools, and organising "kaffeemik" events (typical social gatherings with coffee and cake).

More information:
greenfjord-project.ch

Aerial view of RV Sanna.
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Polar Access Fund

The Polar Access Fund, co-funded by SPI and BNP Paribas Swiss Foundation, supports early-career researchers' initial fieldwork in a polar or remote high-altitude region. The research must relate to climate change and be part of an existing overarching project. Funding of up to CHF 20,000 per project is available.

The Polar Access Fund's seventh call for proposals was open from November 2023 to mid-January 2024. Twelve applications were received – one more than the previous year (11 in 2023). Six projects were recommended for funding by the external panel of experts.

In total, the successful projects received CHF 97,745 (see table p. 12). The early-career researchers are affiliated with four different research institutions, and female scientists represent one-third of the grant recipients.

The projects cover diverse topics, from those representative of polar research domains, such as oceanography, glaciology and ecology, to less common fields, such as archaeology and medicine. Five projects focus on the Arctic, and one on a high-altitude area.

Due to the cancellation of a selected project in 2023, an additional proposal on the psychological dynamics in Antarctic research stations was supported in 2024.

The 2024 call for proposals also included the possibility to create outreach content for the Swiss Polar Class educational programme.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/spi-funding-instruments/polar-access-fund

Exploring ocean circulation and ventilation in the Central Arctic

Marcel Scheiwiller is a doctoral student at ETH Zurich. His field trip aboard the icebreaker *Polarstern* took him to the Central Arctic Ocean and the North Pole.

This water region is recognised as one of the world's most rapidly changing areas, in response to anthropogenically induced climate change. Several mechanisms contribute to this transformation, including the increasing influence of warm Atlantic water in the Arctic.

The project focuses on using long-lasting radionuclides present in water, especially Iodine-129, Uranium-236, Carbon-14, and Argon-39, as reliable tools for measurement and modelling. This data collection aims to contribute to a better understanding of decadal changes in ocean-circulation dynamics within the Central Arctic Ocean.

Marcel Scheiwiller at the North Pole.

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SPI Exploratory Grants

SPI Exploratory Grants support established Swiss-based researchers active in polar and remote high-altitude regions. The launch of new ideas or collaborations, as well as fieldwork and logistics, are the focus of this funding scheme that covers costs of up to CHF 75,000 per project.

The seventh call for proposals for SPI Exploratory Grants was open from August to October 2024. Out of 13 submissions, the SPI funded four projects on the recommendation of an external panel of experts, for a total of CHF 261,700 (see table p. 12). The panel underlined the proposals' high overall quality and competitiveness.

Support was granted to three projects in the Arctic and one in the Pamir and Tien Shan mountain ranges, with fieldwork investigating the Arctic atmosphere, geological processes and high-altitude glaciers.

Half of the successful applicants are female researchers. The grantees are affiliated with three different research institutions.

2024 was also an intensive year for previous years' grant recipients as they carried out fieldwork and collected data in Greenland, Svalbard, Iceland and Antarctica.

Finally, in line with SPI's sustainability strategy, the SPI Exploratory Grant application documents were updated to incorporate considerations for reducing related environmental impacts while optimising scientific outputs (see p. 21).

More information:

swisspolar.ch/spi-funding-instruments/spi-exploratory-grants

Evolution of lake ecosystems and their biological communities

In the summer of 2024, SPI Exploratory Grant recipient Blake Matthews and his team from Eawag embarked on a field campaign to southern Greenland.

Fieldwork focused on some of the thousands of freshwater lakes scattered between the Greenland Ice Sheet and the ocean. These lakes provide a habitat for Greenland's two freshwater fish species – the Arctic char and three-spined stickleback – as well as for hundreds of freshwater invertebrate and plant species.

The goal of this project is to study the processes of lake colonisation, organismal adaptation, and the formation of new species. To do so, the research team will sample lakes of varying age and connectivity to learn more about the evolution of lake ecosystems and their biological communities.

The massive impact of melting glaciers on the origin and development of lakes is best studied off-campus by looking at entire landscapes.

© 2024 Blake Matthews, all rights reserved



SPI Technogrants

SPI Technogrants support the development of technologies relevant for research in polar and other extreme environments. The call is open to Swiss-based researchers at all levels, including those working in the private sector.

In August 2024, the sixth call for proposals for SPI Technogrants was issued and remained open for two months. In line with SPI Exploratory Grants, the funding cap per project was set at CHF 75,000.

From the five submissions evaluated by an external panel, three projects were selected, for an allocated total spend of CHF 163,250. Successful applicants come from federal schools of engineering and a university of applied sciences. Two projects are led by women (see table p. 12).

The technologies will serve different functions: from the development of novel and innovative sensing systems to life-support technologies necessary for operations in extreme environments.

Two projects have a specific geographic focus (high-altitude regions and the Arctic) while the third develops a technology useful in cold environments across the globe.

As with other SPI funding instruments, the application documents for SPI Technogrants were revised to incorporate considerations towards SPI's sustainability efforts (see p. 21). Applicants are now encouraged to propose cleantech innovations for polar research and to reduce the environmental cost of data acquisition in these regions.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/spi-funding-instruments/spi-technogrants

The Airborne Ice Radar of ETH Zurich (AIR-ETH)

Knowing the ice thickness of glaciers is essential for a number of reasons, ranging from the planning of ice-core drillings to determining how much global sea level might rise due to glacier melt. Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR) is the most common way to measure it.

In this project conducted by a group of researchers based at ETH Zurich and WSL Birmensdorf, Daniel Farinotti and his team set out to greatly improve the “Airborne Ice Radar of ETH Zurich (AIR-ETH)” – a custom-built GPR that can be attached to a helicopter to measure glacier thickness on large scales.

More specifically, the aim was to make the system lighter, to improve how the system's position is determined, to increase the quality of the GPR signal, and to boost the system's versatility of use.

The AIR-ETH system suspended below a helicopter during flight.
 © 2024 Daniel Farinotti, all rights reserved



PoIARTS

A joint initiative of SPI and Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, PoIARTS enables a dialogue between polar sciences and the arts. The initiative supports tandems between an artist and a scientist who studies polar topics. The artist may additionally request support to join the scientist during fieldwork.

The third PoIARTS call for proposals was issued in 2023 with a submission deadline of January 2024. The call generated great interest, confirming once again the demand for support for transdisciplinary projects between the arts and polar sciences.

Submitted proposals were evaluated in spring 2024 by a panel of experts comprised of polar scientists and art specialists. Three tandems were selected for support (see table p. 12).

The tandems have since started their collaborative work and meet on a regular basis. Fieldtrips to polar regions are planned for 2025 and preparations have started already, with different project members undergoing health and safety training for fieldwork (see p. 22).

Finally, SPI and Pro Helvetia also renewed their partnership for PoIARTS for the second time. The collaboration will continue for the period 2025–2028, ensuring the publication of another two calls for proposals.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/spi-funding-instruments/polarts

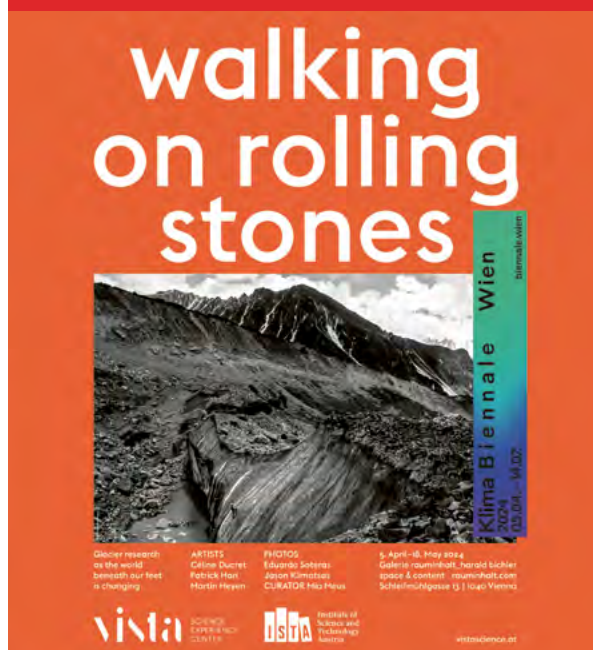
PoIARTS in the limelight

Several PoIARTS projects selected in 2021 benefitted from public visibility at various art events in 2024.

For example, Céline Ducret’s work was featured in the “Walking on Rolling Stones” exhibition on glacier research, held at the Klima Biennale in Vienna, Austria. The PAMIR Flagship Initiative (see pp. 5–6) provided the scientific backdrop for the exhibition. She also participated in the “Grand Nord” exhibition at the Ferme-Asile in Sion (Valais), which was curated around the theme of artistic interpretations of the Arctic.

Maëlle Cornut’s PoIARTS collaboration with Gianalberto Losapio (UNIL) on changing glacial ecosystems – “Glacier Companion Species” – was shown at the Musée valaisan des Bisses as part of the exhibition “Watching the Glacier Disappear”. This vast public art exhibition across Switzerland aimed to raise awareness of the impact of climate change on glaciers and what their disappearance means on cultural and societal levels.

The “Walking on Rolling Stones” exhibition poster.
 © 2024 ISTA/Klima Biennale, all rights reserved



SPI GRANTEES

GRANTEE	INSTITUTION	PROJECT	REGION	FINANCIAL SUPPORT (CHF)
SPI FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES (2022–2026)				
Martin Hoelzle and Francesca Pellicciotti	University of Fribourg, Institute of Science and Technology Austria	From ice to microorganisms and humans: Toward an interdisciplinary understanding of climate change impacts on the Third Pole (PAMIR)	📍 High-altitude Pamir, Central Asia	1,500,000
Julia Schmale	EPFL	Greenlandic Fjord ecosystems in a changing climate: Socio-cultural and environmental interactions (GreenFjord)	📍 Arctic Narsarsuaq, Greenland	1,500,000
POLAR ACCESS FUND (2024)				
Nora Meriem Khelidj	University of Lausanne	Species interactions in a warming world: Revealing glacier retreat impact on alpine-arctic pollination networks	📍 Arctic	16,946
Grace Marsh	EPFL	Climatic Impacts of Glacial Outwash Plains in Western Greenland	📍 Arctic Western Greenland	9,300
Monika Maślikowska	University of Zurich	Boundary Spanning for Sustainable Innovation in Extreme Teams	📍 Antarctic	8,640
Bastien Ruols	University of Lausanne	Characterization of the internal structure and geometry of the Ward Hunt ice rise using 3D drone-based ground-penetrating radar	📍 Arctic Nunavut, Canada	17,550
Marcel Scheiwiller	ETH Zurich	Exploring ocean circulation and ventilation in the Central Arctic: A comprehensive study using multiple tracers	📍 Arctic Central Arctic Ocean	16,750
Rodrigo Soria	University of Bern	Nocturnal Continuous Positive Air Pressure therapy in patients with chronic mountain sickness. A randomized clinical trial	📍 High-altitude Bolivia	17,500
Noah Steuri	University of Bern	ALANA: Arctic Landscape Archaeology in Northern Alaska	📍 Arctic Alaska, US	19,700
SPI EXPLORATORY GRANTS (2024)				
Martina Barandun	University of Fribourg	Glacier response to summer rain in the Tien Shan and Pamir	📍 High-altitude	72,470
Radiance Calmer	EPFL	Evolution of the Arctic boundary layer using in situ measurements from drones	📍 Arctic	71,800
Jack Gillespie	University of Lausanne	Linking the development of Earth's early atmosphere and the genesis of the continental crust	📍 Arctic	66,845
Benjamin Klein	University of Lausanne	Studying the magmatic roots of flood basalts in the Seiland Igneous Province, Arctic Norway	📍 Arctic	50,585
SPI TECHNOGRANTS (2024)				
Marius Banica	ZHAW	Extraction of water from the mesophase of a passive low-temperature liquid water storage system: Selection of a minimal energy process	📍 Antarctic, Arctic, High-altitude	74,700
Mylène Jacquemart	ETH Zurich & WSL	FIBR-ICE: Revealing glacier dynamics with distributed fibre-optic strain and temperature sensing	📍 High-altitude	63,500
Julia Schmale	EPFL	Automated tethered balloon (ATB)	📍 Arctic	25,050
POLARTS (2023–2024)				
Sandra Brügger, Palaeoecology Janis Polar Huber, Visual artist	University of Basel, Paul Scherrer Institute	Fire & (A)Ice – Exploring image-based aesthetics of microfossils in ice cores	📍 Arctic	12,450
Ružica Dadić, Research Unit leader Ramon De Marco, Sound scenographer	WSL	Sounding Snow	📍 High-altitude	12,140
David Janssen, Research Group leader Pauline Agustoni, Designer	Eawag	Hydrorecord: Water as a connector across space and time	📍 Arctic	12,240

GRANTEE	INSTITUTION	PROJECT	REGION	FINANCIAL SUPPORT (CHF)
INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION (2024)				
Núria Casacuberta Arola	ETH Zurich	Chasing radionuclides of artificial and natural origin in one of the most unexplored areas of the subpolar North Atlantic	📍 Arctic Arctic Ocean	53,650
Samuel Jaccard	University of Lausanne	Origi-Nd: Characterising the origin and transformation of water masses in Baffin Bay using neodymium isotopes	📍 Arctic Baffin Bay	53,650
KONRAD STEFFEN GRANTS (2022–2024)				
Gabriel Chevalier	University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland	Integrated disaster risk management in Greenland	📍 Arctic	50,000
Jürg Schweizer	WSL	Greenland–Switzerland Avalanche Collaboration	📍 Arctic	25,000
Markus Stoffel	University of Geneva	SULEQATIGIIPPUGUT (Greenlandic for “we collaborate”) – Building capacities for integrated management of natural hazards and risks in Greenland	📍 Arctic	25,000
VENDÉE GLOBE COLLABORATION (2022–2025)				
Thomas Frölicher Nicolas Gruber Samuel Jaccard	University of Bern ETH Zurich University of Lausanne	Science and sailing to collect environmental data during the Vendée Globe race	📍 Antarctic Southern Ocean	In-kind
MERTZ FELLOWSHIP (2024)				
Mariapina Vomero	Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, Australia	Surface meltwater transport in Antarctica – Mapping supraglacial lake drainage events on ice shelves using satellite imagery	📍 Antarctic	AUD 10,000 Funded by the Embassy of Switzerland in Australia
Sheng Wang	ETH Zurich	Seeing the Unseen Icequakes in Antarctic with Advanced Seismic Array Analysis	📍 Antarctic	AUD 10,000 Funded by SPI

Field and Summer Schools

SPI contributes to costs for undergraduate, master's and doctoral students affiliated with a Swiss academic or research institution to participate in field schools and training courses. The financial support aims to encourage students to acquire specialised experience and knowledge.

Students who have been accepted into field schools and training programmes related to topics and disciplines relevant to polar and high-altitude areas can apply for SPI financial support. The main aim is to assist with travel costs and programme fees. This funding also applies to courses that teach research skills relevant to these disciplines.

In 2024, 12 students (6 women, 6 men) received funding to participate in programmes in Chile, Austria, Greenland, Italy and Norway. This brings the total number of grantees to 29 since the Field and Summer Schools funding instrument began.

The number of beneficiaries doubled from the previous year, indicating a growing interest in this form of support for early-career researchers.

More information:

swisspolar.ch/spi-funding-instruments/field-and-summer-schools

Giving context to research conducted in and about Greenland

In September 2024, doctoral student Marjolein Gevers (University of Lausanne) took part in a two-week summer school organised by the Greenland Ice Sheet Ocean Science (GRISO) network in Nuuk, Greenland. The topic of the course was “Beyond the ice edge: linking science and society at Greenland’s coastal margins.” It aimed to teach students about an integrative approach to science conducted in and about Greenland.

“The summer school is especially useful,” said Marjolein, “if you are interested in building a network within the Greenland research community. It also helps if you are keen to learn more about how to conduct research in Greenland in a more ethical and inclusive way. This is in alignment with Greenland’s new research strategy.”

Student excursion during the 2024 GRISO summer school.

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Konrad Steffen Grants

Konrad Steffen Grants are an initiative of SPI and the Greenland Research Council (NIS), with a focus on integrated risk management and knowledge exchange between Switzerland and Greenland. The programme acts as a bridge between scientists and practitioners to increase the impact of polar science.

In memory of Konrad Steffen, a world-renowned Swiss glaciologist, the eponymous grants build on his legacy of collaborative research between Switzerland and Greenland. The first two projects, the “Greenland-Switzerland Avalanche Collaboration” and “SULEQATIGIIPPUGUT (Greenlandic for ‘we collaborate’)”, run from 2022–2025. A new project called “Integrated disaster risk management in Greenland” runs from 2024–2026.

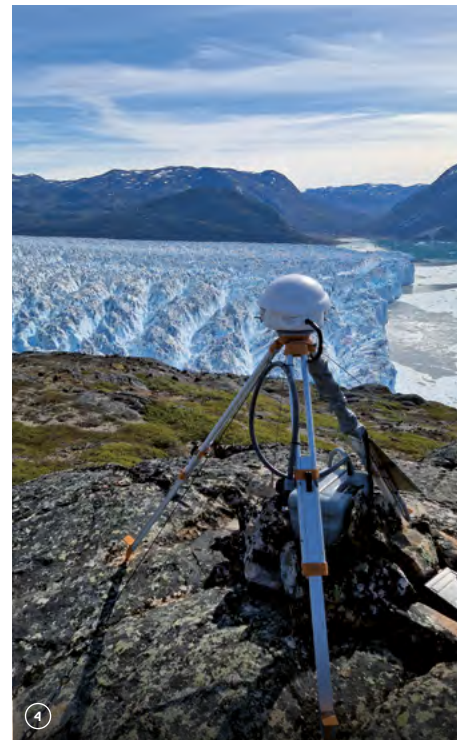
The Integrated disaster risk management in Greenland project aims to promote best practices and support the elaboration of a strategic framework for hazard and risk assessment tailored to Greenland’s context.

The main objective of the Greenland-Switzerland Avalanche Collaboration project is to develop a network to exchange knowledge between the two countries, fostering the development of state-of-the-art mitigation strategies in Greenland.

Recognising the importance of forming the next generation of scientists and decision makers, the SULEQATIGIIPPUGUT project is organising a summer school on integrated risk management, planned for 2025 in Greenland.

A conference session with grant beneficiaries on integrated risk management in the Alps and Arctic was held in January 2025 in Bern at the RIMMA 2025 International Conference on Forecasting, Preparedness, Warning, and Response.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/konrad-steffen-grant



- ① Polar Access Fund: The kitchen tent with Walker Hill in the background. Ward Hunt Island, Canada. © 2024 Éliot Sicaud, all rights reserved
- ② PAMIR Flagship Initiative: Installation of a low-cost Lidar sensor to monitor stream level variation, Tajikistan. © 2024 Thomas Shaw, all rights reserved

- ③ Field and Summer School: UNIS course AG-825 Glaciology 2024, Svalbard. © 2024 Armin Dachauer, all rights reserved
- ④ GreenFjord Flagship Initiative: Monitoring the ice-ocean boundary of an ocean-terminating outlet glacier in southwest Greenland. © 2024 Armin Dachauer, all rights reserved



5



8



6



7



9

5 Polar Access Fund: Fieldwork in Greenland. The valley floor becomes less vegetated on approach to the glacier, until there are only rounded rocks and loose sediment.
© 2024 Grace Marsh/Ianina Altshuler, all rights reserved

6 SPI Technogrant: Robot deployment on Kyzylsu Glacier in the Pamir Mountains, Tajikistan.
© 2024 Max Polzin, all rights reserved

7 Polar Access Fund: Tent rings discovered during the ground survey. Archaeological site in Northern Alaska, US.
© 2024 Noah Steuri, all rights reserved

8 PolARTS: Capturing sound on ice. Grisons, Switzerland.
© 2024 Ramon de Marco, all rights reserved

9 SPI Exploratory Grant: Cold storage room at Dome C, Antarctica.
© 2024 Matthias Jaggi, all rights reserved

Collaboration

Nurturing partnerships with institutions in Switzerland and around the world is central to the Swiss Polar Institute’s mission, as it enables synergies between organisations, targeted support services and access to third-party infrastructure for the Swiss polar and high-altitude research community.

National collaborations

2024 was a year of consolidating partnerships. The renewed partnership with BNP Paribas Swiss Foundation ensured the continuation of dedicated funding for early-career researchers to access polar regions for their first fieldwork experience (see p. 8). The promotion of the dialogue between the arts and science will also continue for the period 2025–2028 with PolARTS, in partnership with Pro Helvetia (see p. 11). We are also thankful to Fondation Oertli for supporting the French translation of *Erschreckend schöne Bilder*, an exhibition on climate change by University of Zurich and Fachklasse Grafik Luzern.

SPI and SDSC also extended their collaboration for 2024–2028, thus ensuring state-of-the-art support in data management and data science for polar and high-altitude science (see p. 6). SPI also met with Space Exchange Switzerland (SXS) to explore the potential for collaboration on satellite data for polar research.

In Sion, the second edition of the Swiss Polar Class Festival facilitated the opportunity to strengthen ties with local and cantonal institutions, in particular Energypolis Campus, EPFL Valais Wallis, the Canton of Valais, Médiathèque Valais, Fondation Opale and Ferme-Asile cultural centre (see p. 29).

At the federal level, SPI continued to work closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). Multiple events organised by the Swiss delegations and embassies abroad provided opportunities to showcase Swiss polar and high-altitude science, underscoring its importance and fostering conversations in science diplomacy.

Finally, SPI maintained a close connection with the Swiss Commission for Polar and High Altitude Research (SKPH) at the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT) to ensure that synergies continue to benefit Swiss polar and high-altitude science.

International collaborations

SPI seeks to deliver concrete added value through access to international research infrastructure and support of fieldwork. For example, thanks to the agreement between SPI and Institut nordique du Québec (INQ) signed in 2023, two scientific teams from UNIL and ETH Zurich took part in the Amundsen Expedition in October 2024 to investigate changes in environmental parameters in the Baffin Bay, an area highly sensitive to climate change.

During the year, SPI continued its active engagement in multilateral networks, such as the

Forum of Arctic Research Operations (FARO) and the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP). SPI also represents Switzerland on the European Polar Board (EPB) and was a partner in the EU-funded “EU-PolarNet2” project which aims to co-develop and advance European polar research activities.

These international networks pave the way for Swiss contributions in upcoming international initiatives such as Antarctica InSync – an ambitious, international multi-year programme led by Germany – to make detailed scientific observations in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean and to share data and knowledge to support better decision-making. As an institutional partner, SPI has taken the lead to support participation and coordination between potential Swiss contributors.

On 26 February 2024 in Sion (Valais), SPI and Tara Ocean Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and held a joint workshop to present the new low-carbon-emissions drifting station to Swiss-based researchers, creating new opportunities for field access.

SPI also welcomed international delegations, and visiting scholars who gave stimulating conferences to the Energypolis Campus community.

With the environmental footprint of fieldwork being a global challenge for polar and climate sciences, SPI also continued to engage in larger conversations at important gatherings of the international polar community, such as the Arctic Circle Assembly in Iceland. SPI’s contribution focused on the sustainability of polar research and sharing of international expertise (see red box).

Innovative platforms for a lower carbon footprint of polar science

Environmental impact, best practices and complementary expertise were at the heart of exchanges during the Polar Dialogue and plenary session “Floating Platforms in Polar Seas: Sailing for Science” at the Arctic Circle Assembly 2024 in Reykjavík, Iceland. Various organisations operating sailing and floating platforms reflected on strategies to amplify their positive impact on polar research, enabling scientific data collection with minimal environmental burden.

Co-organised by AWI, SPI and Éditions Paulsen, the session united a rich panel of experts: Patrick Aebischer (Forel Heritage Association), Cornelius Eich (Boris Herrmann Team Malizia), Arved Fuchs (OCEAN CHANGE, Germany), Morten Rasch (Activ Expeditions), and Romain Troublé (Tara Ocean Foundation).

Both the Vendée Globe race (see p. 20) and Antarctica InSync represent timely opportunities for an agile, proficient and sustainable integration of scientific research with these innovative methods of accessing polar seas.

More information:

youtu.be/aU4kbvNxik8

Experts at the “Floating Platforms in Polar Seas: Sailing for Science” session.

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Extreme sailing for polar research: a race for change

The start of the Vendée Globe race in November 2024 marked a highly anticipated moment in the three-year collaboration between SPI, Swiss skipper Oliver Heer and research groups from ETH Zurich and the universities of Bern and Lausanne.

Initiated in 2022, the data-collection campaign has been at the heart of this partnership – combining expertise from the worlds of sailing and environmental science – to gain precious insights into the Southern Ocean’s role in global climate. The Vendée Globe race is a unique opportunity to collect scientific data in this globally critical, yet understudied, region.

As a major sink of human-made CO₂ emissions and excess heat, the Southern Ocean represents one of the key modulators of the global climate system. Aboard his IMOCA yacht *Gitana 80*, Oliver Heer has continued the data-collection campaign with an OceanPack RACE® “Underway” system manufactured by the German company subCtech. Fitted in September 2022, the SPI-funded instrument was also used during the training and qualification races of the Vendée Globe 2024.

This campaign brought open-science practices to the fore, as similar oceanographic measurements were carried out by other competing sailing yachts. All collected data will be made available through open-access data repositories and the resulting research will be published in open-access journals.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/vendee-globe

Swiss Polar Class sets sail during the Vendée Globe

The partnership with Oliver Heer Ocean Racing inspired new opportunities to develop educational content for non-specialist audiences.

The new Swiss Polar Class activity “Cap au Sud/Segelrennen um die Antarktis” enabled the enrolled classes to follow the Swiss skipper during the race. A new chapter every fortnight covered topics on the history of human exploration of Antarctica, ocean currents and ocean life, the importance of oceans in the global climate, and the impact of anthropogenic activities. Each class also received a bespoke world map to track Oliver’s progress and students were able to ask him questions and receive regular video updates.

This new activity recorded unprecedented interest from schools all over Switzerland with:

- 393 classes registered from 25 cantons,
- 2900 students at the online launch event,
- 500 questions submitted by students,
- 9 modules published in 5 months,
- 5 interviews with oceanography experts.

More information:
polar-class.ch/cap-au-sud

The map distributed to classes presents an Antarctica-centric view of the world.
© 2024 Swiss Polar Class



Sustainability

In all its activities, SPI fosters diversity and pays particular attention to the environmental impact of fieldwork. Sustainability is one of the cornerstones of SPI's values – alongside agility, equality and integrity – and is embedded in strategic and operational levels.

A bottom-up approach for driving positive change

In 2023, SPI launched a community survey during Swiss Polar Day. The results helped identify priorities and shape the next steps in addressing the environmental footprint of polar and high-altitude research. In 2024, SPI defined four principles to drive its actions for long-term, positive impact:



Reduce the environmental footprint across all SPI activities



Promote the development and use of environmentally friendly technologies



Devise, apply and share best practices



Seek innovative alternatives to carbon offsetting

Although several principles have already been embedded in the SPI Secretariat's operational activities since its inception, 2024 saw them also included more tangibly in SPI's funding

instruments. This revision comes in addition to the carbon compensation already in place and aims to encourage applicants to measure and mitigate the carbon footprint of their research whenever possible.

SPI Exploratory Grants and SPI Technogrants were the first two calls to implement these aspects that will be rolled out in all SPI funding instruments (see pp. 9–10).

Carbon emissions assessment tool

To assist researchers in calculating the projected and effective emissions of their projects, SPI developed an easy-to-use carbon emissions assessment tool. Freely shared upon request and open to community feedback, this CO₂ calculator was also presented to the international polar science community at the ICARP IV Summit during Arctic Science Summit Week in March 2025.

SPI considers sustainability not only as a goal and a set of practices but also as a process that requires resilience, continuous efforts, long-term commitment, and an open conversation with the polar research community.

More information on our sustainability journey: swisspolar.ch/about-us/

Services and Events

The Swiss Polar Institute works in close collaboration with the Swiss polar community to facilitate their work in the field and offers a variety of scientific events and courses. Additional services and information have been developed to help scientists carry out their fieldwork safely and efficiently.

Data management

To provide the Swiss polar community with information and access to best practices, SPI represents Switzerland in international organisations such as the Standing Committee on Antarctic Data Management (SCADM) and the Arctic Data Committee (ADC).

Support for data curation and data publication is also part of SPI's services, encouraging open-access data from SPI-led expeditions, research projects and multi-year programmes. In 2024, collaboration with the Swiss Data Science Center (SDSC) was renewed for the Flagship Initiatives to maximise the interdisciplinary data collected using state-of-the-art data science approaches.

SPI also offers workshops on data management from storing and backing up data, to recording metadata and preparing for fieldwork. A 44-page guide to good data management is available to all: doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5531876

Research containers

SPI is the co-owner of two research containers that are mostly used for atmospheric science testing and experimentation.

In 2024, the “red container” (co-owned with Paul Scherrer Institute) was deployed in Antarctica. It travelled on *RV Polarstern* to Neumayer Station in the second half of the year. The deployment is planned to last until spring 2027.

The “white container” (co-owned with EPFL and ETH Zurich) was optimised for travel and deployment in India, in the Himalayan foothills, for the Indian-Swiss “ICE-CRUNCH” research project, a collaboration between ETH Zurich and the Central University of Jammu. Fieldwork is planned to start in April 2025.

Health and safety in the field

SPI offers training courses for research groups on the health and safety aspects of fieldwork, in partnership with Groupe d'Intervention Médicale en Montagne (GRIMM).

In April and November 2024, SPI organised two regular first-aid courses for fieldwork, focusing on the unique challenges of high-altitude and polar regions and how to make the most of available materials when standard medical services are lacking. Both courses were fully booked. Two customised medical kits were provided to field teams and used by four research groups in 2024, as well as the SOS MAM telehealth service. SPI also organised a technical and safety skills course for working on glaciers, including crevasse rescue techniques.

For the first time, SPI offered training on the human aspects of fieldwork to help researchers manage social dynamics within field parties (see red box).

Finally, a webpage was created with resources for fieldwork and campaign preparations.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/services-for-fieldwork-and-logistics

Building a positive team culture for safe and effective fieldwork

On 13 May 2024, SPI held its first workshop on social dynamics and fieldwork. This topic is of growing importance, as many studies have indicated that the success of field campaigns and the well-being of field parties depends heavily on social factors and human interactions.

Practical and solution-oriented methods are at the heart of this course. The aim is to equip field parties for future campaigns by focusing on codes of conduct, leadership roles and styles, decision-making styles, debriefing as a risk management tool, and bystander effect and intervention.

The workshop, organised in collaboration with the Advancing Field Safety programme, an initiative created by members of ETH Zurich, the University of Colorado Boulder and the ADVANCEGeo Partnership, will be offered again in 2025.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/building-a-positive-team-culture-for-safe-and-effective-fieldwork

*An example of trust and teamwork in the field, captured during the Patagonian Icefields Research Program.
© 2024 Michaela Mühl, all rights reserved*



SPI scientific events

SPI organises scientific events to offer a space for the Swiss scientific community to network, share information, and discuss developments within the field. These events also serve as a platform to explore collaboration opportunities and best practices in polar and high-altitude research. In addition to the health and safety trainings, 12 events were held on a wide range of topics (see table, opposite page).

Swiss Polar Day took place on 12 September 2024 at the University of Fribourg and offered a rich panorama of the current research in polar and high-altitude science. The event consisted of 19 Open Forum presentations, three keynotes and two presentations on international and national collaboration opportunities – Antarctica InSync and the Swiss National Point of Contact for satellite data (NPOC).

From navigating logistics and customs paperwork to preparing for unpredictable conditions, the 2024 early-career researchers' event, held in May, focused on the various aspects to consider when planning a field campaign.

More information:
swisspolar.ch/events

Exploring synergies with Tara Polar Station

On 26 February 2024 in Sion (Valais), SPI and Tara Ocean Foundation held a joint workshop on the new drifting scientific observatory/laboratory *Tara Polar Station*.

The workshop explored synergies between the two organisations and presented the low-carbon-emissions station and its innovative research possibilities. Workshop attendees included Swiss-based researchers who work in biology and in interactions with the atmosphere, sea ice and the ocean.

The collaborative workshop concluded with both parties formalising their agreement with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

*The hybrid workshop with Tara Ocean Foundation took place in SPI's Reading Room.
© 2024 Swiss Polar Institute*



SELECTION OF SPI EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

DATE	EVENT & NUMBER OF ATTENDEES	PLACE	DETAILS
26 February	Workshop on opportunities with the Tara Ocean Foundation, followed by MoU signing 👤 49	📍 ALPOLE, Sion, Switzerland/Online	Information event on the upcoming <i>Tara Polar Station</i> and collaboration opportunities.
1 March	Workshop for collaborative research between AWI and SPI 👤 34	📍 Online	The workshop built on existing synergies to foster new collaborations between AWI and Swiss-based scientists working in both Antarctic and Arctic regions.
4 March	Vendée Globe 2024 - Ocean Sailing and Data Collection, a Race for Change 👤 Open event	📍 UniBe & ETH Zurich, Switzerland	Two events presenting the collaboration between SPI, University of Bern, ETH Zurich and the Swiss professional sailor Oliver Heer.
14 March	Screening of "PARADICE – La procession des glaciers" documentary 👤 46	📍 ALPOLE, Sion, Switzerland	The Canal 9 documentary on Swiss glaciers was presented to the Energypolis Campus community in the presence of the film's directors.
22–23 March	Health & Safety Training (in collaboration with GRIMM) 👤 13	📍 Sion/Aminona-sur-Sierre, Switzerland	Yearly course on first-aid techniques and telemedicine services in the field. The training is offered to Swiss research groups and carried out in an Alpine environment.
3 April	"Geopolitics in the Arctic" – a lunchtime conference with Prof. Rasmus Bertelsen, UiT the Arctic University of Norway 👤 20	📍 ALPOLE, Sion, Switzerland/Online	This lunchtime conference for the ALPOLE research community was part of Prof. Bertelsen's visit to SPI.
5 April	Science speed meeting at BNP Paribas Swiss Foundation 👤 36	📍 Zurich, Switzerland	Presentation of four Polar Access Fund projects to BNP Paribas Swiss Foundation collaborators.
7 May	Tips for planning a successful field campaign 👤 49	📍 ETH Zurich, Switzerland/Online	Event for early-career researchers. Various perspectives offered a rich overview of logistics and administrative requirements when planning a field campaign.
24 May	"Expeditions and Discoveries in North Greenland" – Fireside talk with Christiane Leister 👤 32	📍 ALPOLE, Sion, Switzerland	The event was followed by a panel discussion on public-private partnerships for polar science.
29 May	Building a positive team culture for safe and effective fieldwork (in collaboration with Advancing Field Safety Programme) 👤 10	📍 ALPOLE, Sion, Switzerland	Pilot course on social dynamics in the field offered to Swiss research groups.
13–15 June	Training course for glaciated terrain (in collaboration with GRIMM) 👤 12	📍 Moiry Glacier, Switzerland	Introduction to technical gear, such as crampons and ice axes, basic rope techniques, glacier travel and crevasse rescue techniques.
29 August	SPI Exploratory Grants and SPI Technogrants information events 👤 12	📍 Online	Information on the goal and submission process for the 2024 edition of the SPI Exploratory Grants and SPI Technogrants calls for proposals.
3 September	"Changes in Greenland coastal ecosystems and their impacts" – a lunchtime conference by Prof. Shin Sugiyama, Hokkaido University, Japan 👤 18	📍 ALPOLE, Sion, Switzerland/Online	This lunchtime conference for the ALPOLE research community was part of Prof. Shin Sugiyama's visit to SPI.
12 September	Swiss Polar Day 2024 👤 179	📍 University of Fribourg, Switzerland/Online	Annual SPI conference for the Swiss polar and high-altitude research community with Swiss and international speakers.
19 October	"Floating platforms for polar science" workshop and plenary session 👤 Open event	📍 Arctic Circle Assembly, Reykjavik, Iceland	Co-organised by AWI, SPI and Éditions Paulsen, the events united a rich panel of organisations operating platforms in polar seas.
8–9 November	Health & Safety Training (in collaboration with GRIMM) 👤 12	📍 Sion/Arolla, Switzerland	Yearly course on first-aid techniques and telemedicine services in the field. The training is offered to Swiss research groups and carried out in an alpine environment.

Communication and Outreach

In addition to providing dedicated support to the polar and high-altitude science community in Switzerland, the Swiss Polar Institute also offers educational content for non-specialist audiences. It uses various communication channels to raise awareness about polar science and its importance in better understanding the links between the local and polar dimensions of climate change.

Throughout the year, collaborations on polar themes with cultural institutions in Valais and beyond continued to weave meaningful links between polar science and the arts. Two notable mentions go to the Ferme-Asile cultural centre in Sion for their “Grand Nord” exhibition, which presented artistic interpretations of the Arctic, and the Swiss Alpine Museum (ALPS) in Bern, for its “Greenland. Everything changes” film exhibition.

For a younger audience, SPI also further developed the Swiss Polar Class (SPC). This programme for primary school children gained an unprecedented following during the second edition of the Swiss Polar Class Festival, especially thanks to the latest module on oceans launched in the context of the Vendée Globe race (see p. 20).

Communication channels

During 2024, the website was revised to accommodate new information on services and courses. The “About us” page was overhauled to present SPI’s sustainability journey (see p. 21). After the homepage, the “Projects” page remains the second-most visited page on our website, followed by the “Swiss Polar Day 2024” event page. This underscores the enduring interest in our networks and latest research projects.

2024 was also a year of change and opening new channels. Our YouTube channel was updated with fresh content related to events, courses and funded projects. SPI’s social media presence also diversified as growing concerns about X (formerly Twitter) led many users, especially scientists, to leave the platform, impacting the number of SPI’s followers. While keeping a stable presence on X, the decision was made to expand to other social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Bluesky, to maintain meaningful engagement with our audience, networks and partner institutions. The regular newsletter mailings remain the most comprehensive format to stay informed about SPI’s latest news and collaboration opportunities.

SPI was also present in traditional media: Television channel Canal 9, magazine *Femina*, and newspapers *Le Nouvelliste* and *Le Temps* increased the visibility of SPI’s activities to a broader audience in 2024.

SPI PARTICIPATION IN EXTERNAL EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

DATE	EVENT	PLACE	SPI CONTRIBUTION
22 January	Antarctica InSync meeting	📍 Online	Numerous other coordination meetings related to Antarctica InSync international programme throughout the year
25 January	Forum of Arctic Research Operators (FARO) Executive committee	📍 Online	Preparation of the annual general meeting, events, exchange
31 January	Challenges and opportunities in the Arctic	📍 Royal Norwegian Embassy, Bern, Switzerland	Presentation and roundtable discussion
11 February	Arctic Hub Connect	📍 Online	Presentation of Swiss activities in Greenland in 2024
21 March	FARO General Assembly	📍 Edinburgh, UK	Presentation of SPI developments and Swiss small platforms
21 March	"Grand Nord" exhibition opening	📍 Ferme-Asile, Sion, Switzerland	Participation and networking
29 March	Swiss Commission for Polar and High Altitude Research (SKPH) General Assembly	📍 Bern, Switzerland	Presentation of SPI developments
23–24 April	European Polar Board (EPB) Spring Plenary Meeting	📍 Online	Swiss representation
10 May	Inauguration of Swiss Honorary Consulate in Hokkaido, Japan	📍 Online	Presentation of SPI-Hokkaido collaboration
14–17 May	Tara Polar Station meeting	📍 Cherbourg, France	Participation
24 May	Meeting of Switzerland–United States Joint Committee on Science and Technology	📍 Bern, Switzerland	Presentation of Swiss–US polar collaboration
4 June	Ice Melt/Snowmelt and their impact on mountain regions in Colorado and Switzerland, event held by the Consulate General of Switzerland in San Francisco	📍 Boulder, US	Co-organisation and introduction
20 June	Swiss Ocean Day	📍 Bern, Switzerland	Participation
13–16 August	Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) Annual General Meeting	📍 Buenos Aires, Argentina	Swiss representation
10 September	Swiss Maritime Strategy – Environmental aspects: Strengthening sustainability standards in the use of marine resources, event held by FDFA	📍 Bern, Switzerland	Participation
18 September	Soirée Suisse at the Embassy of Switzerland	📍 Washington DC, US	"Lat.Alt.Alps" exhibition curated by SPI
19 September	Impacts du dérèglement climatique dans les Alpes	📍 Ambassade de France en Suisse, Bern, Switzerland	Co-organisation and moderation
18 October	Tara Polar Station session at the Arctic Circle Assembly	📍 Reykjavik, Iceland	Presentation
18 October	Arctic Science Funders Forum Annual Meeting	📍 Reykjavik, Iceland	Swiss representation
26 October	"Greenland. Everything changes" exhibition opening	📍 Swiss Alpine Museum, Bern, Switzerland	Contribution to roundtable
4–5 November	GreenFjord Annual Assembly	📍 Lausanne, Switzerland	Organisation, minutes and facilitation
6 November	Foraus Aussenpolitische Impulse event "Routes maritimes dans l'Arctique et avenir du commerce mondial: à quoi s'attendre pour la Suisse?"	📍 Bern, Switzerland	Presentation and contribution to roundtable
7–8 November	PAMIR Annual Assembly	📍 Fribourg, Switzerland	Organisation, minutes and facilitation
12–13 November	EPB General Assembly	📍 Den Haag, Netherlands	Swiss representation
3 December	SKPH General Assembly and Prix de Quervain	📍 Bern, Switzerland	Presentation of SPI developments

Swiss Polar Class (SPC)

Since 2020, Swiss Polar Class (SPC) offers an educational programme focused on raising awareness of the polar regions and their fragility. Tailored for teachers and students, the multimedia content and lessons are fully aligned with the Swiss-German and Swiss-French primary school curricula and accessible to everyone.

In 2024, outreach efforts continued and existing collaborations were strengthened. The programme had 419 registered teachers with their classes in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, and 295 in the German-speaking part. In total, 4,174 children participated in SPC events and activities across Switzerland. An additional 413 interested people followed the programme.

SPC collaborated with various museums and cultural institutions, including the Kornhausforum (Bern), the North America Native Museum (Zurich) and the Médiathèque Valais (Sion), for workshops for classes and families. SPC continued to work with the Children's University of Zurich on polar class workshops and outreach events, and participated in the Energia festival in Veytroz (Valais). A new treasure hunt about Greenland was developed and designed, with one copy on loan to the Swiss Alpine Museum (Bern) for class visits during the "Greenland. Everything changes" exhibition.

Two "Ask a polar scientist" online events (in French and German) also took place in spring, with a total attendance of 458 children. SPC also organised its own "Futurs en Tous Genres" day in collaboration with EPFL Valais Wallis and EPFL's Service des Promotions des Sciences. It featured a special science outreach workshop in November with ten participants.

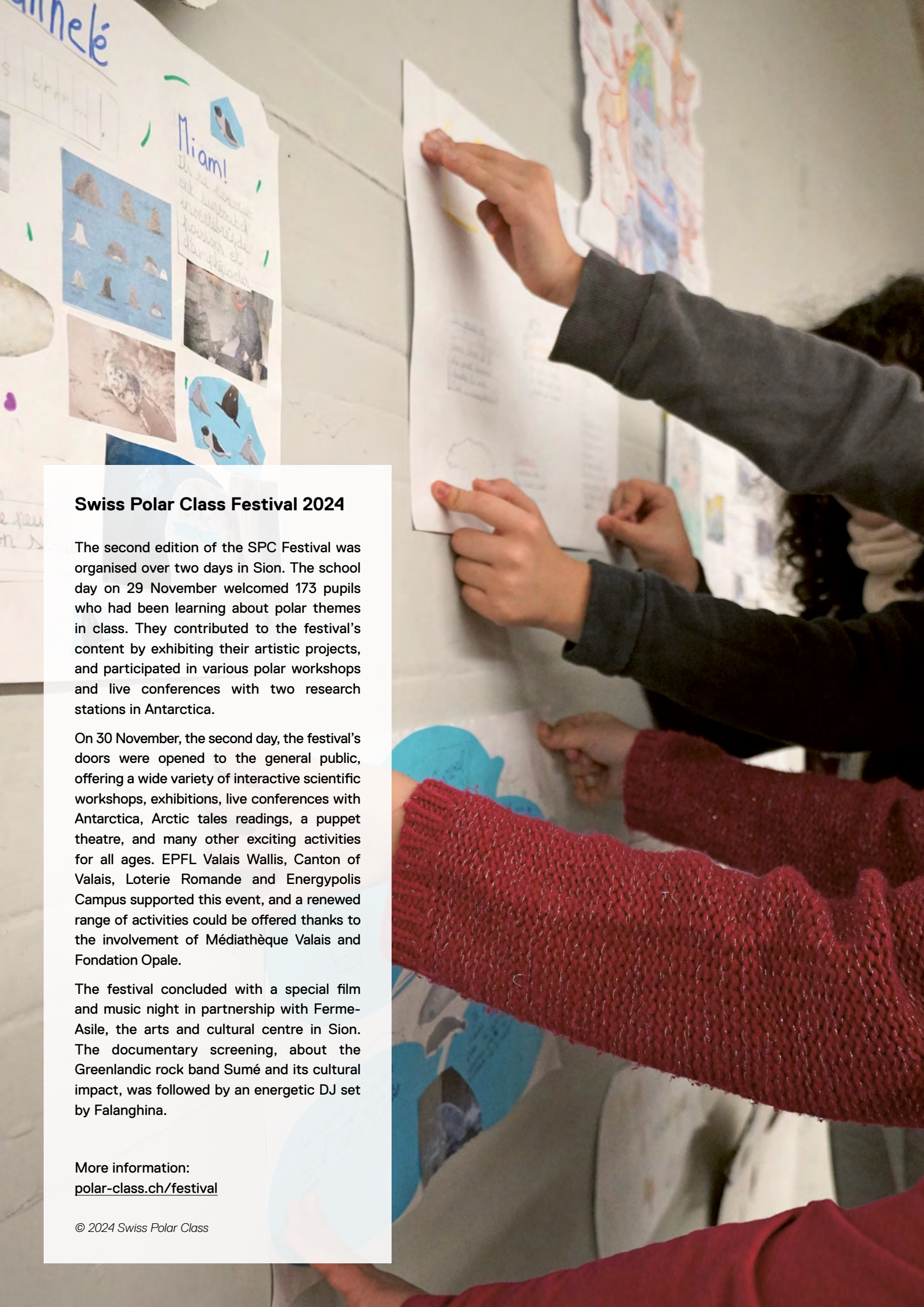
Collaborations with the two SPI Flagship Initiatives, PAMIR and GreenFjord, continued, with new content developed for publication in summer 2025.

A new nine-module activity was created on the topic of oceans in partnership with the Swiss professional sailor Oliver Heer (Oliver Heer Ocean Racing) and published during his participation in the Vendée Globe 2024–2025 race (see p. 20).

To celebrate Antarctica Day, the second edition of the Swiss Polar Class Festival took place on 29 and 30 November. In collaboration with Fondation Opale, Ferme-Asile and Médiathèque Valais, the event has become a part of the local cultural scene, attracting around 700 visitors over the two days (see opposite page).

In 2024, the Swiss Polar Class organised

- **1 polar festival**
on 2 days
with 696 visitors
and 4 live conferences with Antarctica
- **1 new educational activity**
with 9 modules
and 393 registered classes
in 25 cantons
- **15 workshops**
in collaboration with 1 festival
2 universities
and 3 cultural institutions
- **2 online events**
1 in French, 1 in German
with 458 students
and 20 registered classes



Swiss Polar Class Festival 2024

The second edition of the SPC Festival was organised over two days in Sion. The school day on 29 November welcomed 173 pupils who had been learning about polar themes in class. They contributed to the festival's content by exhibiting their artistic projects, and participated in various polar workshops and live conferences with two research stations in Antarctica.

On 30 November, the second day, the festival's doors were opened to the general public, offering a wide variety of interactive scientific workshops, exhibitions, live conferences with Antarctica, Arctic tales readings, a puppet theatre, and many other exciting activities for all ages. EPFL Valais Wallis, Canton of Valais, Loterie Romande and Energypolis Campus supported this event, and a renewed range of activities could be offered thanks to the involvement of Médiathèque Valais and Fondation Opale.

The festival concluded with a special film and music night in partnership with Ferme-Asile, the arts and cultural centre in Sion. The documentary screening, about the Greenlandic rock band Sumé and its cultural impact, was followed by an energetic DJ set by Falanghina.

More information:
polar-class.ch/festival

Internal developments

Serving a vibrant research community and growing at a steady pace, the Swiss Polar Institute saw its national status renewed by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) for the next funding period. This recognition marks an important milestone and highlights the relevance of SPI's mission to offer optimal support to the Swiss community.

Foundation and governance

In addition to the members listed on the opposite page, SPI's Foundation Board includes, as observers, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Commission for Polar and High Altitude Research. An external Science and Technology Advisory Board maintains connections with national and international communities on scientific and technological matters.

In anticipation of the retirement of Martin Vetterli (EPFL) at the end of 2024, the SPI Foundation Board appointed two of its current members, Frédéric Herman (UNIL) and Christian Wolfrum (ETH Zurich), to the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair, fostering continuity and a smooth transition. Their mandates started on 1 January 2025. In 2024, the SPI Foundation Board also welcomed Virginia Richter, who succeeded her predecessor, Christian Leumann, as the new University of Bern representative.

In December 2024, SPI's national status was renewed by SERI for the period 2025–2028. We are thankful for the continued trust and recognition of the important contributions of the Swiss polar and high-altitude science community.

Internal projects

Sustainability in polar science has been a priority for SPI and a key internal project. In 2024, while continuing to offset the carbon emissions of its Secretariat, SPI built on insights from the previous year's community survey to address the carbon footprint of polar science through its funding instruments (see p. 21).

Finances

In 2024, SPI had an operating budget of CHF 4.2 million, from which CHF 2 million of project grants were funded. CHF 0.7 million was dedicated to value creation through specialised courses, services and events (see pp. 22–25), and outreach activities (see pp. 26–29). The remainder covered the operational costs of the SPI Secretariat.

SPI is funded by the Swiss Confederation as well as by Swiss research institutions (EPFL, ETH Zurich, UNIBE, UNIL, UZH, WSL). In 2024, the funding received from the Swiss Confederation was matched thanks to financial support from philanthropic partners, in particular Frederik Paulsen and the Swiss Polar Foundation.

FOUNDATION BOARD

as at 31 December 2024

In 2024, the Foundation Board met in April and November.

Martin Vetterli	Chair	EPFL
Frédéric Herman	Vice-Chair	University of Lausanne
Christoph Hegg		WSL
Frederik Paulsen		Lausanne
Virginia Richter		University of Bern
Elisabeth Stark		University of Zurich
Christian Wolfrum		ETH Zurich

Members who left the Foundation Board in 2024

Christian Leumann		University of Bern
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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY BOARD (STAB)

as at 31 December 2024

In 2024, the STAB met in January and September.

Hubertus Fischer	Chair	University of Bern
Björn Dahlbäck	Vice-Chair	Formerly Swedish Polar Secretariat, Sweden
Naki Akçar	SKPH delegate	University of Bern
Jérôme Chappellaz		EPFL
Kelly Kenison Falkner		Formerly US NSF, United States
Daniel Farinotti		ETH Zurich and WSL
Dame Jane Francis		British Antarctic Survey, United Kingdom
Patricia Holm	SKPH delegate	University of Basel
Samuel Jaccard		University of Lausanne
Joan Nymand Larsen		University of Akureyri, Iceland
Jennie Thomas		Institut des Géosciences de l'Environnement/CNRS, France
Andreas Vieli		University of Zurich
Meike Vogt		ETH Zurich

SPI STAFF

as at 31 December 2024

7.9 full-time equivalents

Nele Demeulemeester	Administrative Collaborator
Paul Ducommun	Swiss Polar Class – Project Manager Romandie
Basil Fahrlander	Scientific Collaborator; Deputy Director
Anita Feierabend	Scientific Collaborator; Swiss Polar Class – Project Manager Deutschschweiz
Janine Frost	Head of Finance; Deputy Director
Konstantin Gavazov	Scientific Collaborator
Jelena Ristic	Communications Officer
Danièle Rod	Executive Director
Nina Schuback	Scientific Collaborator
Ólafur Yngvi Stitelmann	Scientific Collaborator

Staff who left the SPI in 2024

Laurence Mottaz	Office Manager
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Testimonials

“Advancing polar science is vital, linking our planet’s history with the urgent policies we need for a sustainable future.”

Frédéric Herman,
Rector of the University of Lausanne,
new Chair of SPI Foundation Board

“I have learned many aspects of what organising such an expedition means, and I will be 100% better prepared for the next one.”

Bastien Ruols,
Doctoral student at University of Lausanne,
Polar Access Fund beneficiary

“Both the scientific and personal backgrounds of the participants of the course were so diverse and led to engaging and refreshing discussions. I come home with new ideas and motivation to continue to work in this important and fascinating research field.”

Kathrin Maier,
Graduate student at ETH Zurich,
Field and Summer School beneficiary

“Switzerland has a very diverse and interesting polar research community and it’s been a pleasure to be here.”

Ana Maria Trofaier,
Technical Officer, ESA
Swiss Polar Day keynote speaker

“The Polar Access Fund was instrumental in making the ALANA project a reality. Without this funding, we couldn’t have carried out such an ambitious project in Northern Alaska.”

Noah Steuri,
Archaeologist at University of Bern,
Polar Access Fund beneficiary

“We can never decouple our survival on this planet from the ecosystems that sustain us. [...] We need to train the next generation of ecosystem ecologists and cultivate their contributions to society – a society that is in desperate need of a new ecosystem ethic. We thank the Swiss Polar Institute for their continued support of early-career researchers and fieldwork at the frontiers of climate change research.”

Blake Matthews,
Research Group Leader at Eawag,
SPI Exploratory Grant beneficiary

“My students really enjoyed it! They were very interested, and we had many good discussions. I even learned a great deal myself.”

Teacher participating in the Swiss Polar Class’
Cap au Sud/Segelrennen um die Antarktis module

“At Pro Helvetia, we really hope [that the PolARTS programme brings] a productive dialogue for thinking outside the box, questioning of practice, and future development of new methods.”

Seraina Rohrer,
former Head of Innovation & Society at Pro Helvetia
in the “Art meets... PolARTS” podcast episode



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IMPRESSUM

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COVER PHOTO

The bow of *RV Sanna* in
icy Greenlandic waters.
The photograph was taken
during the 2024 summer field
campaign of the GreenFjord
Flagship Initiative.
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