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Connecting European snow cover variability with large scale atmospheric patterns

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Abstract. Winter snowfall and its temporal variability are important factors in the development of water management strategies for snow-dominated regions. For example, mountain regions of Europe rely on snow for recreation, and on snowmelt for water supply and hydropower. It is still unclear whether in these regions the snow regime is undergoing any major significant change. Moreover, snow interannual variability depends on different climatic variables, such as precipitation and temperature, and their interplay with atmospheric and pressure conditions. This paper uses the EASE Grid weekly snow cover and Ice Extent database from the National Snow and Ice Data Center to assess the possible existence of trends in snow cover across Europe. This database provides a representation of snow cover fields in Europe for the period 1972–2006 and is used here to construct snow cover indices, both in time and space. These indices allow us to investigate the historical spatial and temporal variability of European snow cover fields, and to relate them to the modes of climate variability that are known to affect the European climate. We find that both the spatial and temporal variability of snow cover are strongly related to the Arctic Oscillation during wintertime. In the other seasons, weaker correlation appears between snow cover and the other patterns of climate variability, such as the East Atlantic, the East Atlantic West Russia, the North Atlantic Oscillation, the Polar Pattern and the Scandinavian Pattern.

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