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Focus on the Swiss Alps



Researchers from Kyrgyzstan, Cameroon, and Switzerland discussing local farmers' land use practices. Photo: Karina Liechti

Research for sustainable development in the Swiss Alps

NCCR North-South research in the Swiss Alps has focused primarily on regional development. Protected areas and World Heritage Sites have been key research topics. Researchers analysed, for example, the effects of being designated an official World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Does the label truly enhance the conservation of “outstanding and universal values”? Or does it function more as an international seal of quality that attracts tourists? The impacts of tourism and outdoor recreation on the Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch UNESCO World Heritage Site were another important research topic.

Alpine pastures in Switzerland serve many purposes. They provide farmers a place to graze their animals, of course, but they are also places for recreation and valuable habitats for biodiversity. The multifunctional use of Swiss alpine pastures bears interesting insights for researchers from countries in the global South. An NCCR North-South study was launched between the Swiss Alps and West Africa to enable knowledge exchange about livestock farming and management of shared pastures.

Swiss farm owners continually work to improve their farms' efficiency while fulfilling high environmental and social standards. Researchers examined one aspect of these social standards: the working conditions of farm labourers. They analysed how Swiss agricultural policy addresses this vulnerable group.

Editorial



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Research partnerships enable us to examine complex problems from different perspectives. Joint projects conducted in the Swiss Alps by northern and southern researchers, exchange between researchers and practitioners, and application of new approaches facilitated a rich learning environment and many new findings over the course of the NCCR North-South programme.

The Swiss Alps partnership region has been the only site of NCCR North-South case studies located in the “North”. However, the topics of our research in the region have been very similar to those examined in developing countries. We have conducted research on regional development in general and sustainable development in mountain areas in particular. These emphases grew out of long-standing research in the region and were enhanced by international exchange. Recent programme research included studies of “governance of natural resources under changing conditions”, in which researchers sought to identify pathways of institutional change regarding use and management of common-property pastures. Other studies looked at “monitoring of protected areas” in an effort to improve methods for observing changes in the landscape due to changing patterns of human use. Certain Swiss projects profited from expertise gained through testing in other development contexts, including a project to elaborate a participatory management plan for a Swiss UNESCO World Heritage Site as well as a project to apply the One Health approach in Switzerland.

This newsletter presents selected projects conducted by northern and southern researchers in the Swiss Alps. Thanks to their emphasis on application, many of the projects have already begun to influence local policy and practice. We hope they will continue to contribute to the region’s sustainable development also in the future.

I wish you enjoyable reading.



Focus on the Swiss Alps

World Heritage Sites – protection or promotion?

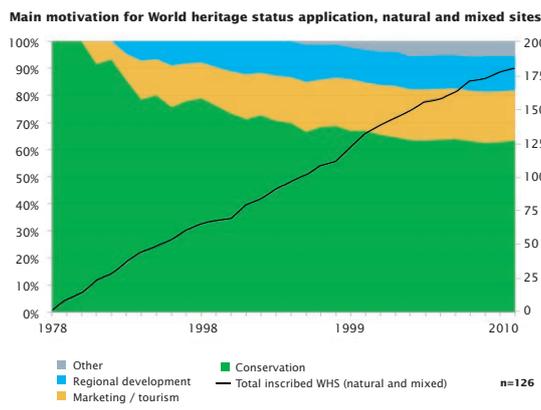
To date, 936 places worldwide have been designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites. But what does this mean? Does the designation truly enhance the conservation of “outstanding and universal values”? Or is it much more an international seal of quality that attracts tourists?

Despite the popularity of World Heritage status, there have been few comparative studies of the site-specific effects of the UNESCO label. A 2012 global survey of all Natural World Heritage Sites, carried out within my



The Aletsch Glacier in the Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch UNESCO World Heritage Site. Photo: Katharina Conradin (2009)

PhD thesis, reveals changing motivations for seeking a spot on “the list”. In the 1970s and 1980s, applicants mainly saw the UNESCO



Motivations for World Heritage status application over time. Source: Katharina Conradin

designation as a means to protect a site. But in the 1990s, many applicants began viewing World Heritage status as a means of promotion.

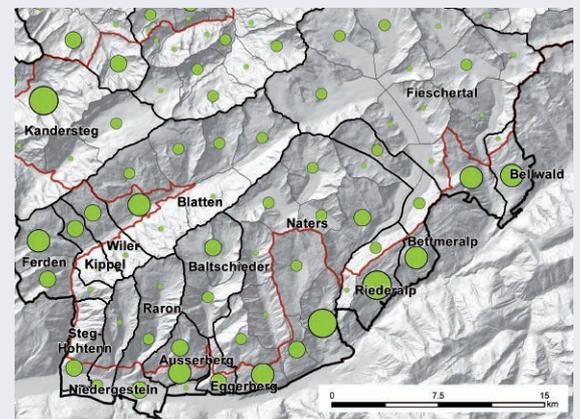
According to the global survey, applicants' initial motivations may influence the later impact of World Heritage status on broader regional development. Among those who utilise it promotionally, the World Heritage designation was more frequently seen as positively influencing regional development. Yet these same respondents also more frequently reported that protection of the site itself had improved. These results show the promise of combining conservation goals with regional development, sustainably benefiting people and the environment.

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Outdoor activities in sensitive areas: assessing the impact of recreation on Alpine landscapes

"The exploitation of landscapes for recreation is intensifying and becoming more diverse," aptly observed the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment recently. This is especially true of alpine areas, where features of the natural landscape enable a wide variety of outdoor activities. In collaboration with the management centre of the Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch UNESCO World Heritage Site, researchers are studying the impact of activities such as snowshoeing, skiing, hiking, and biking on the region's natural environment. Indeed, while these

activities might appear in harmony with nature, they can endanger delicate features of the natural environment. So far, there are scarcely any precise data on the extent of recreation in landscapes belonging to the World Heritage Site. Clues to such information are provided by the number of overnight stays recorded at Swiss Alpine Club huts and elsewhere, tourism transportation statistics, and the concentration of mobile phone signals. But these indicators say little about the spatial dynamics of outdoor activities and their environmental effects. To learn more about the unknown spatial variables, researchers pinpointed the known routes and locations of recreational activities. They also spatially recorded sensitive environments and protected areas. In a follow-up step, the disruptive effects of outdoor activities and the sensitivity of protected areas were assessed and thematically displayed on maps. The vegetation in wetland areas, for example, is sensitive to being trodden upon, while wildlife refuge areas are mainly affected by disturbances during winter periods when animals need quiet. The compiled maps represent a starting point for negotiations over measures to manage visitors and limit harm to the sensitive natural environment of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.



This map illustrates the use of areas for outdoor activities during the summer: the size of the green circles is proportional to the area being used. This includes hiking trails, alpine routes, mountain huts of the Swiss Alpine Club, mountain bike routes, climbing areas, take-off and landing sites for hang-gliders, and picnic areas. Source of basic map: Swiss Federal Office of Topography (5701 190204)

The researchers involved in developing this key focus area include Maria Paulsson, Bernhard Stöckli, Karina Liechti, and Urs Wiesmann.

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Day trippers on the Alp Nagens, municipality of Laax, canton of Graubünden. Photo: Gabriela Landolt

Alpine pastures: when a common-pool resource becomes public

In Switzerland, the challenge of reconciling the public interest in protecting Alpine cultural landscapes with individual livelihood strategies is not only discussed at the level of protected areas such as national parks. Similar diverging interests have also become apparent in highly traditional institutions such as alp associations, who manage communal alpine pastures (alps) in the eastern canton of Graubünden. These traditional common-pool resource (CPR) institutions have proved to be able to adapt to changing conditions over centuries. In the last few years, however, there has been a significant rise in the number of alp associations facing difficulties in keeping up their CPR management system. "This is a worrying trend," says researcher Gabriela Landolt, who, in an effort to find out why this is happening, is carrying out ethnographic research in two villages of the Surselva region in the canton of Graubünden.

One of the very recent challenges observed is the increasing gap between diverging expectations of alpine pastures: on the one hand, as a common-property good providing mainly economic services to local farmers; on the other, as a public good providing cultural and ecosystem services to the public. The results of the research will be compared with the findings of NCCR North-South researcher Gilbert Fokou, who conducted field research on pasture management in Switzerland and Cameroon, and a joint publication is planned.

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How farmers adapt to changing conditions in the Swiss Alps

Rapidly changing economic, political, and social conditions are contributing considerably to transforming the use and function of Swiss alpine farming. Alpine agriculture is increasingly multifunctional, shifting from the production of commercial goods to the provision of environmental services. This was made possible through a series of policies that were implemented in the Swiss Alps over the past 60 years. These policies have contributed to sustaining mobile livestock systems, conferring tangible benefits to local farmers. The policies have also helped to conserve biodiversity and maintain environmental quality. Alpine agricultural policy is based on a set of regulations that affect adaptive strategies of farmers and conditions for collective action.



NCCR North-South researcher Gilbert Fokou conducting fieldwork in Stuls, Bergün, in the canton of Graubünden. Photo: Raffaella Zaugg

The sophisticated mechanisms for the use of Swiss alpine pastures (alps) integrate tradition and modernity in a fascinating way, and may therefore be of interest to researchers and policymakers from other parts of the world. This was the rationale behind the idea of a southern researcher conducting a study in Switzerland as an exchange between the NCCR North-South's partnership regions in the Swiss Alps and West Africa. Focusing on transformations of institutions for common-property pasture management in eastern Graubünden, this study demonstrated that the number of farmers is decreasing without reducing the capacity for producing goods and maintaining the natural environment. The direct payments policy that compensates farmers for providing environmental services is central to maintaining this system.



Cheese storage on an alp in Laax, Graubünden: More than just a commercial good, cheese made on alpine summer pastures is a cultural heritage. Photo: Gilbert Fokou

The sustainability of the alpine pasture system relies on farmers developing various strategies for adapting to changing conditions, such as reorganising alp associations and maintenance work on the alps; reorienting production strategies (from dairy cows to mother cows); and promoting the direct marketing of local products. Thus, alpine farmers should not be perceived as “alpine gardeners” or “stewards” who maintain the landscape to protect biodiversity promote or tourism, but as rural entrepreneurs who contribute to the country’s sustainable development.

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Can domestic fair-trade initiatives improve conditions for agricultural labourers in Switzerland?

Swiss agricultural policy seeks to balance increases in efficiency with maintenance of high environmental and social standards. Many Swiss farmers anticipate a growing dichotomy in agriculture, with specialised niche-based production on the one hand and industrial farming on the other. But even large-scale Swiss farmers struggle to increase their efficiency while fulfilling high environmental and social standards. Our research focuses on one aspect of these social standards: the working conditions of agricultural labourers, especially in labour-intensive horticulture and viticulture. How does Swiss policymaking address this most vulnerable group? Most labourers come

from other European countries and work seasonally. Their lack of organisation and marginal social and economic standing expose them to exploitation. Unsurprisingly, their concerns are typically brushed aside in negotiations over Swiss agricultural policies.



Seasonal farm labourers harvesting lettuce in Switzerland. Photo: Christoph Hurni

Nevertheless, there have been local experiments in domestic fair trade that have sought to improve their situation. Certain private institutions have essentially adopted state responsibilities, allocating fair-trade labels based on voluntary commitments from farm owners. These initiatives are a step in the right direction. But improving and enforcing laws on labour conditions that ensure fair treatment of labourers is even more important.

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Implementing One Health in Switzerland

The intention of this project* was to transfer to Switzerland the promising NCCR North-South research results the One Health concept had produced in the South. One Health is understood as closer cooperation between human, animal, and ecosystem health; its benefits have been validated in several case studies in West Africa. This project initiated several transdisciplinary stakeholder processes with health representatives from different levels of government and practice. It was launched by the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute and the Public Health Division of the Swiss canton of Ticino.



*Dogs develop cancer faster than humans due to their shorter lifespan. Our hypothesis is to use them as an “early warning system” for human exposure to cancer risks.
Photo: Andrea Meisser*

The project aimed to raise awareness on the Swiss public-health scene of the potential that the One Health approach has in an industrialised country such as Switzerland. Unlike in developing countries, the focus is not on zoonoses, but on non-communicable diseases (e.g. obesity, cancer, depression). So, for example, a study on the feasibility of introducing a joint registration of cancer cases in humans and dogs, combined with a geographic information system, has recently been set up in the canton of Basel-Stadt. The underlying idea concerns the fact that dogs and humans share the same environment and lifestyle. Given that dogs develop cancer faster than humans due to their shorter lifespan, our hypothesis is to use them as an “early warning system” for human exposure to cancer risks. Other activities lead to a better understanding of health-related aspects of the human–animal relationship (e.g. walking a dog and mobility of the elderly).

“The level of the cantonal administration seems to be ideal, with its intermediate position between federal and communal governments. Thanks to a far-reaching autonomy in health governance, new approaches can be implemented fairly quickly, and results will show up within an assessable time frame,” says researcher Andrea Meisser. The example of the canton of Ticino is highly replicable and is now being scaled up in a follow-up project with the canton of Basel-Stadt. These prototypes will be watched closely by other cantons and the relevant federal offices, and can serve as examples for other industrialised countries.

**This project was conducted under the NCCR North-South’s PAMS (Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes) scheme of pilot projects designed to test NCCR North-South research in real-world settings.*

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In a nutshell: NCCR North-South Swiss Alps

Research in the Swiss Alps partnership region has mainly focused on issues of regional development. Individual research projects have examined: protected areas and World Heritage Sites (participation, management, and monitoring); regional development in mountain areas; and common-property resource governance and institutional change.

Programme activities in the Swiss Alps partnership region have brought together researchers and practitioners, supported local application of methods that were developed

in the global South (e.g. the One Health approach), and built teams of northern and southern researchers working on shared topics of interest (e.g. common-property pasture management). Key achievements include: elaboration of a management plan and a monitoring system for the Swiss Alps Natural World Heritage Site; NCCR North-South research fellowships acquired by southern researchers; completion of several bachelor’s, master’s, and PhD studies; and the provision of university courses to students.

Alumni Interview

What did you do your PhD on? I investigated the relationship between tourism, conflict, and peace in Nepal. Nepal went through a decade of armed conflict. My research analysed the conflict's effects on tourism management and operations. I examined the tourism industry's coping strategies and its potential for peacebuilding.

How is the region of the Swiss Alps related to your PhD? My PhD fieldwork in Nepal focused on mid- and high-altitude mountain areas, attractive to tourists locally and globally. The Swiss Alps are very similar, in terms of topography, vegetation, climate, and mountain-tourism appeal. In 2009–2010, I stayed in the Swiss Alps as part of my NCCR North-South exchange, in an effort to gain outside insights that might be useful in Nepal. Switzerland and Nepal have much in common as destinations for mountain tourism, but clear differences remain. International tourism to Switzerland is at least 150 years old, beginning when British tourists came for mountaineering and winter sports. So mass tourism to popular Swiss mountain destinations has reached a very mature stage. By comparison, mountain tourism to Nepal could be said to be 60 years old, going back to Maurice Herzog's first successful ascent of Mt. Annapurna in 1950, or Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's first ascent of Mt. Everest in 1953. But mass tourism there has not reached a stage of growth comparable to Switzerland's. Differences are clearly visible in terms of people's awareness of, and ability in, managing tourism sustainably. This has distinct repercussions for peace promotion.

What experiences did you gain while doing your fieldwork in the Swiss Alps? I observed local approaches and conducted in-depth interviews with Swiss tourism promoters, farmers, restaurant owners, and managers of hotels and ski resorts in Alpine destinations like Grindelwald, Zermatt, Saas-Fee/Saastal, Bettmeralp, and Riederalp. My analysis of trends in Swiss Alpine tourism showed that some mainstream tourist destinations – such as Grindelwald and Saas-Fee – are gradually adopting a sustainable approach, while continuing to accommodate growing mass tourism. Certain aspects of Switzerland's responsible approach – such as efficient collection of waste and recyclables even in remote mountain villages and high community participation in tourism – were a great lesson for me. Such practices could be replicated in Nepal for peace-promoting responsible tourism.

What, for you, are the greatest challenges in your current work? The results of my research into community-based and peace-sensitive tourism could have important implications for policy. However, their national-level uptake will likely continue to be slow and intermittent in Nepal, limiting their effect on policy and practical development interventions. I see this as the single greatest challenge. Building grassroots-level awareness, knowledge, and capacity around peace-sensitive tourism is another key challenge.

How do you think your research can make a difference – can you give a concrete example? Fulfilling Nepal's tourism potential will require a broad shift from conventional tourism to community-based rural tourism that encourages local participation, ownership, and peace-sensitive practices. These practices should be anchored in context-specific codes of conduct observed by both tourists and tourism proprietors. Through the NCCR North-South, I developed and implemented a pilot project – or Partnership Action for Mitigating Syndromes (PAMS) – titled "Developing a community-based tourism model with the Machhapuchhre Model Trek route in Kaski district". This small-scale research-based development project supported improvement of a trekking route for tourists – including construction of campsites and shelters for porters – that linked seven villages together along the route. Local village women were trained in hospitality, enabling them to provide homestay opportunities to trekkers, and an agreed-upon code of conduct was drafted to steer tourism efforts towards peace and sustainability.

What would you change, if you could? There isn't one thing I would change. I would seek to ensure a beneficial process of exchange in the field of tourism and peacebuilding. This requires: strong dissemination of research findings; replication and application of theoretical and evidence-based approaches in more tourist destinations; and increasing exchange between researchers, practitioners, and local communities to enable mutual learning and concerted actions.



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NCCR North-South News

New NCCR North-South brochure

In the latest brochure, entitled *Partnerships in research for sustainable development: Research highlights and their implications for policy and practice*, we present some of the programme's highlights and scientific achievements over the past 12 years in the research fields of migration, conflict transformation, health care systems, sanitation and wastewater management, natural resources and sustainable regional development, and governance. For further information see www.north-south.unibe.ch.

NCCR North-South policy briefs

Several new regional editions of *evidence for policy* have been published recently, featuring research and development policy recommendations aimed at decision-makers active in each partnership region. They are available for download at <http://www.north-south.unibe.ch/content.php/page/id/305>.

The latest two global policy briefs tackle the following topics: *Threats and opportunities for smallholders in rural development* and *Upholding health for all*.

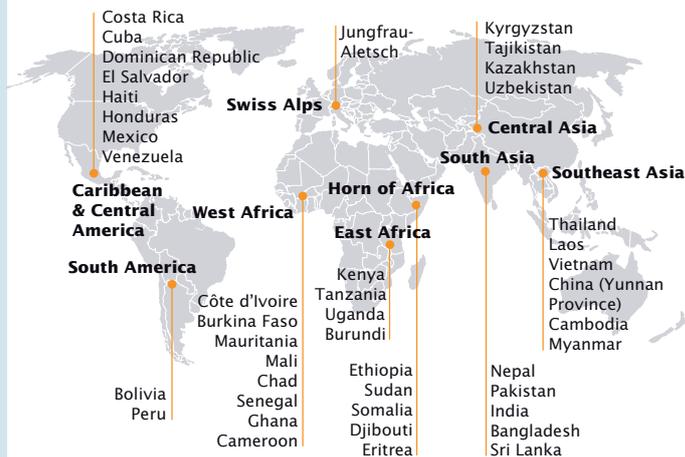
They are available for download at <http://www.north-south.unibe.ch/content.php/page/id/250>.

The NCCR North-South draws to a close

The programme concluded with a final policy event entitled "Research partnerships with the global South: A paradigm shift for Swiss research policy and development cooperation?" At the event held on 4 June 2013, politicians and researchers commented on the potential of North-South research networks and discussed the role of politics in enabling successful development cooperation. For further information and pictures see www.north-south.unibe.ch.

A research fair organised by the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) on 5 June 2013 promoted mutual learning by bringing together researchers and practitioners involved in international cooperation to share and discuss promising and innovative results, processes, and products from research partnerships with developing countries. For further information see www.north-south.unibe.ch.

Partnership Regions



Programme Management

- The NCCR North-South is directed by a board made up of representatives from the Swiss Partner Institutions together with the Regional Coordinators. It is headed by programme directors Hans Hurni and Urs Wiesmann, and coordinated by Thomas Breu.

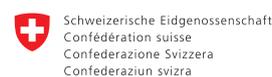
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