

Balancing On An Alp: Ecological Change And Continuity In A Swiss Mountain Community



Review

Balancing Economic Development and Environmental Conservation for a New Governance of Alpine Areas

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Abstract: In the Alpine environment, Man has always been directly dependent on mountain ecosystems. Social mechanisms have created specific models of governance, capable of assuring the persistence of ecosystems and their capacity to provide essential goods and services. In recent decades, however, dramatic changes have occurred, such as climate change and changes in land use. The complexity common to all linked human-natural environment systems is extremely marked in the Alpine areas and this makes it difficult to understand how resilient these systems may be. Many research questions arise, in particular as to the comprehension and quantification of the impact of changes on the capacity of ecosystems to produce goods and services in a sustainable way, and the possibility of local mechanisms of governance to adapt to both current and future changes. Reasons and effects of change are analysed from the perspective of the specific issues of governance. The importance of the Ecosystems Services (ESs) concept is acknowledged and the necessity for a dynamic assessment of ESs, taking into account people's values and expectations, is particularly stressed. Through a careful analysis of selected papers and case studies, the main gaps in current knowledge are identified and directions for further research are provided.

Keywords: governance; sustainable development; landscape scale; ecosystem services; decisions support systems; public participation; Alps

1. Introduction

One of the main problems experienced in natural resources management and planning is that frequently the decision makers have no clear perception of the bonds that unite the population to its home-place, nor do they wholly recognise the ample and complex bundle of values and meanings that individuals and communities attribute to ecosystems [1–4]. This actually often goes far beyond the concerns of managers and planners. In the same way, what is also generally disregarded is the role played by sentiment and emotions in affecting people's care for their territory and the scale of values implicit in their attitudes and behaviour [5,6]. Emotions are often criticised for being irrational [4–6] and considered irrelevant in practical terms. Rather than being underestimated, emotions should

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