

Change and Adaptation in the Swiss Alps: Bargaining Processes and Rule Constitution in the Collective Alpine Farming

PhD-Project by Gabriela Landolt supervised by Prof. Tobias Haller, University of Bern (Switzerland), Institute of Social Anthropology

Netting (1976) and later Ostrom (1990) describe robust institutions in the collective management of common property pastures in Switzerland, which prevent a “tragedy of the commons”. But what happens when conditions change? Two peasant institutions (cooperatives under public law) in two villages in the mountain district of Graubünden show how cooperation and adaptation becomes more difficult as changing factors increase. One peasant institution still manages to adapt, however the other institution faces collapse.



Overview of Switzerland with indication of the two field study locations (red stars)



Alp Nagens (2120 m), Community Laax



Alp Naustgel (1969 m), Community Sumvitg

Objectives

- To compare peasant institutions (*Genossenschaften*) of two communities (Laax and Sumvitg) in the district (*Kanton*) Graubünden (see map on the left) in order to explain two different reactions to change.
- To critically reflect on the theories in use and contribute to the discussions within and about new institutionalism.

Main Research Questions

- Which predispositions and characteristics help peasant institutions such as *Genossenschaften* to survive in the stream of changing conditions and to which changes are they most vulnerable?
- How do the different institutional layers (state, canton and community legislation, peasant institutions) interact and influence each other and how far can they explain the current situation of the peasant institutions?
- What consequences do the different institutional developments have on the sustainable use of the common property pastures?

Methods

Participant observation, historical outline (archival analysis, oral history from biographies, analysis of photo material), open and semi-structured interviews, analysis of formal and informal rules, household surveys and focus group discussions.

Theoretical Background

Elinor Ostrom 1990: 8 Design Principles

Focus: Nested enterprises, interplay of institutional layers and Interdependencies among the Design Principles

Jean Ensminger 1992: Model of Institutional Change

Focus: Critical discussion of the role of exogenous and endogenous factors

Tobias Haller 2010: Comparative approach

Focus: link between bargaining power, ideology (discourse and narrative) and institutions

Preliminary Results

- After World War II the liberalization of the market led to a drop in agrarian prices. Despite of adjustment programs and direct payments by the state many farmers had to give up their business forcing the ones remaining to allow new ways of utilization regarding the common property pastures: farmers from outside the community got access, the number of mother cows increased while the number of dairy cows declined, foreign alp staff were recruited (lack of local staff), the use of some alpine infrastructures changed due to tourism etc.



Picture above: The collective work (*Gemeinwerk*) includes any kind of maintenance work on the alp such as manuring, cleaning of the pastures from rocks and weeds, maintenance of roads and other infrastructure. Each farmer owes two hours of work per cow to the collective work.

- The increase in external actors, as described above, seem to provoke conflictual bargaining processes (as shown in Laax) and unstable institutions while a homogenous group of actors tends to foster robust institutional arrangements (as in Sumvitg).
- The functioning or malfunctioning of the collective work is a good indicator for sustainability and is directly visible in the quality of the pastures. It reflects the ability of the institution to mobilize members, the motivation of the farmers to maintain pastures and infrastructure and the trust in cooperation.

Contact Information

Gabriela Landolt
University of Bern, Switzerland
Institute of Social Anthropology
gabriela.landolt@anthro.unibe.ch

Related Projects in Switzerland:

- Analyzing and Modeling Transitions of Common Property Pastures in the Swiss Alps
- Institute for Systems Science, Innovation & Sustainability Research (ISIS), University of Graz (Prof. Dr. Claudia Binder, Ivo Baur)
- Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern (Prof. Urs Wiesmann, Dr. Karina Liechti)
- Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, University of Indiana (Prof. Dr. Elinor Ostrom)
- Institute for Environmental Decisions, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zürich (Prof. Dr. Bernard Lehmann)

Institutional Change and pasture management in the Swiss Alps

- Dr. Gilbert Fokou (Postdoc, CSRS Côte d'Ivoire)