

Topic for Master thesis:

Contested Semantics of Landscape and Land Cover Categories in Switzerland



Short description: Landscape categories such as ‘forest’, ‘mountainous region’, ‘valley’ or ‘agricultural land’ form an important basis for land use monitoring and planning. However, the semantics of these categories (e.g. what is a forest, where is a forest) may be different in different communities of practice. People therefore may have different understandings of the same category, or use different categories for the same phenomena. Such contested semantics can lead to issues in land use and planning, but are often neglected or ignored.

In a case study in Switzerland, a Master student will document the semantics of an example of a landscape category in different communities of practice, analyse its representations on maps and in GIS, and explore the link between the semantics of that landscape or land cover category with land use from a political ecology perspective.

Languages: The case study site in Switzerland where fieldwork for the Master thesis will be carried out can be selected by the student. Fluency in one of the following languages is a requirement: German (preferably with an understanding of Swiss German), French, or Italian.

Supervision: The thesis will be co-supervised by Muriel Côte (Political Geography), Prof. Dr. Ross Purves (Geocomputation), Flurina Wartmann (Geocomputation)

Remarks: A thesis on landscape categories and political ecology in another setting (e.g. Burkina Faso) is also possible.