Master topic proposal

Paired masters theses: Understanding coupled social-ecological systems

Understanding coupled social-ecological systems requires an in-depth analysis of both the social and the ecological systems, and their interactions and feedbacks. Despite this recognized need, in practice this means that to answer questions related to social-ecological feedbacks requires double the amount of information, data and makes it harder for individual students to conduct it to a satisfactory level.

Here we propose a coupled approach to a Masters' thesis. This means in practice that a pair of students work collaboratively on a project that aims at investigating questions related to the sustainability, resilience and feedbacks between social and ecological systems, and to do so they will both investigate a system (e.g., charcoal production in Mexico, non-timber forest products in India, etc) that relates natural resources with livelihoods, collect data on a variety of indicators that relate to both systems and assess their interaction and potential feedbacks.

While this is a challenging task, it is also exciting as students will work collaboratively, practice data sharing, team work and achieve synergistic results. It is, however, important to keep transparency of idea authority, even workloads and honest assessments of contributions.

Interested? If so, contact Prof. Norman Backhaus (norman.backhaus@geo.uzh.ch) or Prof. Maria J. Santos (maria.j.santos@geo.uzh.ch) for more information on the specific case studies.