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LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT IN SWITZERLAND: WHERE DOES THE SHOE PINCH?

Results of surveys of experts on the identification of challenges and research needs

The aim of this article is to draw attention to those challenges in the “professional engagement” with landscape and its development in Switzerland which need research activity if they are to be met. In particular the current situation is examined and an eye cast to the future. **Marcel Hunziker and Barbara Degenhardt**

Of course there is an almost infinite variety of individual research projects which in the past have concerned themselves with the landscape. There is an excellent overview of the most important landscape projects in Switzerland since 1990, including design and planning activities, in the report by Kothe and Marty (2008). They also include the most important National Research Programmes (NFP) relating to the landscape: NFP 48 and NFP 54 (see table 1).

Not included are older programmes, in particular NFP 05+ (“Socio-economic development and ecological resilience in the mountainous areas”; “MAB”) of the 1970s and 80s. By virtue of its size and the inclusion of a large number of Swiss landscape researchers, this programme represented a milestone in Swiss landscape research, indeed it initiated modern landscape research in Switzerland. The programme synthesis by Messerli (1989) has remained a standard work to this day. There are also more recent standard works, such as that by Kienast et al. (2007), Tanner et al. (2006) and Lehmann (2007), along with all the partial syntheses of NFP 48 and the “Landscape Focus Study” to appear shortly in NFP 54. These are just some of the examples of Swiss research activities and publications; on an international level, there are too many to count.

Main actors of landscape research in Switzerland

By contrast, the number of institutions currently pursuing primarily landscape research in Switzerland is relatively small. Table 1 gives an insight. It includes those institutions that have accepted the invitation of the organizing committee of the 2011 IFLA World Congress to present their landscape research in the context of a research session. The table in other words is not complete, but represents a good introduction to the “research landscape” of landscape research.

Future challenges and research topics

So where is landscape research in Switzerland heading? What challenges are we facing, what challenges have to be overcome not least through research? In the context of a commission from the Forum Landschaft, we at the WSL have tried to get answers to these questions by surveys of experts. Our first concern was to reveal the gamut of current short-to-mid-term and future challenges with relevance to Swiss landscape development. For this purpose, twelve individuals from the worlds of research, administration and actual practice in a wide variety of specialist fields were interviewed. Five interviewees came from the world of research, two from administration, and five were from actual practice. The second goal of the project was to have the previously identified challenges assessed by a wide circle of experts in respect of their current

temporal relevance for the Swiss landscape, and the potential for damage if they were not met. For this purpose, an internet survey was conducted between 6 and 27 October 2009, in which 42 individuals particularly from public offices and practical work in the fields of landscape and open-space planning, land-use planning, architecture and construction took part. In summary, it can be said that the challenges were judged to be primarily either short or mid term, and that if they were not met, the damage would be medium to substantial¹.

Ten themes, which in part overlap, emerged as central of the twelve qualitative expert interviews:

- landscape awareness and discourse,
- financing of landscape issues,
- decision making on landscape issues,
- landscape qualities and values,
- visualization of landscape developments,
- research culture and knowledge transfer in matters affecting the landscape,
- future of peripheral areas,
- future of agriculture and effects on the landscape,
- ecology and landscape conservation,
- renewable energies and the landscape.

In what follows, three themes will be discussed in greater detail, namely those that appear, on the basis of the twelve expert interviews and the 42 expert evaluations of the internet survey, as well as certain considerations by the authors, to be the most relevant in relation to future research needs.

Landscape awareness and discourse

There is no pan-Swiss discourse across all sections of the population on the future shape of the landscape. In addition, there is seen to be a need for the participatory development of regional visions and goals, and it is not clear how public awareness of the value of the landscape can be encouraged. One central problem for targeted landscape development is seen to lie in the lack of communication and cooperation between the various landscape-relevant disciplines and protagonists. There is a lack of any common language or common concepts, and there is no superordinate coordination platform.

Landscape qualities and values

This is where there is by far the largest number of open questions and future challenges. One concrete complaint is that there are

INSTITUTION	MAIN TOPICS	INTERNET
University of Applied Science Rapperswil, Institute for Landscape and Open Space	Landscape development Open space development Nature-based tourism and protected areas landscape design Leisure, landscape and health Materials and construction Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in planning	www.ilf.hsr.ch
ETH Zurich, Institute for spatial and landscape planning, Chair of Planning of Landscape and Urban Systems	Decision support systems for sustainable spatial development Computer-aided planning tools with regard to spatial, environmental and landscape planning, including GIS-based 3D-visualizations Integration of environmental, societal, and economical values in spatial planning	www.irl.ethz.ch/plus
Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL	Landscape development and human-landscape interaction, including their monitoring (LABES) Biodiversity and conservation biology Management of natural hazards Snow and avalanche research Forest ecosystem, protection, and management	www.wsl.ch/forschung/landschaftsentwicklung www.wsl.ch/sla www.wsl.ch/labes
Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Institute of Natural Resources Sciences	Green care and planting design Protection of natural resources Nature and leisure	www.iunr.zhaw.ch
University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland hepia Geneva – Technology architecture and landscape inPACT: Institut du Paysage, de l'Architecture, de la construction et du Territoire	Agriculture and urban design Alpine territories Gardens and society Green walls Vegetation and urban landscape Vegetation and trees management Techniques related to vegetation Virtual landscapes Traffic simulations 3D Geographical Information System	http://hepia.hesge.ch/fr/bachelor/filiere/science-de-la-vie/architecture-du-paysage
National Research Program "Landscapes and Habitats of the Alps" (NRP 48)	Perception Added value Participation Biodiversity Virtual representation	www.nfp48.ch
National Research Program "Sustainable Development of the Built Environment" (NRP 54)	Quality of life Lifestyles Urban landscapes Urban biodiversity Urban open spaces Urban infrastructure	www.nfp54.ch

Table 1: Selection of landscape-research institutions in Switzerland

at the moment no generally accepted instruments for measuring landscape qualities and the arrangement of landscape elements. In particular, it is unclear what the specific aesthetic, ecological and cultural-identity forming landscape qualities in conurbations, in peripheral mountain regions and above all in the everyday unspectacular landscapes might be. It is also unclear how landscape identity arises, and how it can be regionally defined and pinpointed. Landscape changes, it was said, could not at the moment be adequately measured. From the point of view of those questioned, there is an urgent need for appropriate standards and evaluation procedures.

Another complaint was the lack of any synthesis of existing insights into landscape aesthetics. This also means that, against the background of social change, we still do not know what qualities different urban and nearly natural open spaces ought to have for individual groups of users, and how existing open spaces can be upgraded. Here, for example, there is a lack of information on the potential that different open spaces might have for social cohesion. Nor is the state of knowledge on the connexion between landscape and health satisfactory. Alongside the question of the effects of nearly natural open spaces and green-care services on health, the question of the negative effects on people of increasing housing density was also raised.

Research culture and transfer of knowledge

The lack of knowledge in relation to landscape themes was seen to be primarily due to the present structures in research and between research and practice. One unsolved problem was perceived to lie in the inadequate importance attached to interdisciplinary research. A further complaint was that there are still too few research projects linking different landscape issues together. The present state of knowledge transfer was also seen as unsatisfactory, as too few resources were made available for it, for example in research programmes. At the same time, those working in the practical field complained that politically independent information on landscape topics was unavailable. The education of farmers on topics related to sustainable landscape management and on landscape quality was also deemed inadequate, and the public did not have sufficient planning experience to include their aspirations in land-use planning in an appropriate manner.

Discussion and conclusions for landscape research

1. The issue is not so much actual research needs as problems of everyday practice. Often what is needed for a solution to the problems is not so much further research as the transfer of existing knowledge, the joining-up of insights gained from different disciplines as well as from research and everyday practice. The theme of "research culture and knowledge transfer" outlined above thus represents a kind of superordinate challenge, and meeting this challenge would facilitate the solution of numerous specific problems: an old insight, whose implementation requires the further increased and innovative commitment of all involved.

2. In spite of the request for future orientation contained in the two surveys, the results are dominated by past and present issues. This confirms the impression gained from many events and discussions that true early diagnosis is difficult (and surveys of experts may perhaps not be the most appropriate method). At the same time, the results also show that there is an abundance of already topical themes which will continue to be of the greatest importance in the near and more distant future. This is why we urgently need an increased confrontation with the future of our landscape. What are we going to have to face? Which developments are desirable, which should be avoided, which are inevitable? How do we as a society intend to deal with them? The theme "landscape awareness and discourse" shows what challenges must be tackled at a higher level. In this sense, institutions such as the Forum Landschaft Schweiz and events such as IFLA 2011 should be seen as highly positive.

3. Finally, the heavy emphasis on the theme of "landscape qualities and values", and in particular the great need to measure the changes in the physical landscape over time on the one hand and in people's attitudes and perceptions on the other. This need is excellently met by the instrument developed by the WSL on behalf of the Federal Office for the Environment known as "Landscape Observatory Switzerland" (LABES)².

In summary therefore we may conclude that we (not only) in Switzerland need a broad and deep discussion on the future of the landscape, which involves academics, politicians, planners and designers, and in particular the "consumers" of the landscape. Only thus can we adequately recognize and finally meet the challenges that we are going to face.

¹ Degenhardt, B.; Hunziker, M. (2011): Herausforderungen der Landschaftsentwicklung – Aktuelle Forschungstrends und zukünftiger Forschungsbedarf in der Schweiz. Birmensdorf. Online: <http://www.wsl.ch/publikationen/pdf/10898.pdf>.

² Roth, U.; Schwick, Ch.; Spichtig, F. (2010): Zustand der Landschaft in der Schweiz. Zwischenbericht Landschaftsbeobachtung Schweiz (LABES). Umwelt-Zustand Nr. 1010, Bern.

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