

# Tourism Development and Local Actors' Engagement for Sustaining Alpine Forests

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## Introduction

Tourism development in alpine areas fosters a tertiarization of local economies, with a trend to diminished dynamism in the primary sector in general, and in forestry in particular. Besides the many causes eroding the primary sector, the fall in alpine timber production is also due to compressed prices in the context of a globalized timber market and to increasing costs of forest labor making mountain extraction even less competitive. These conditions prevailing now for over three decades, a substantial part of the alpine seasonal forestry work has shifted to the tourism sector and much of the alpine forests are no longer managed, are aging, remain untended and are no longer a resource for sustaining local livelihoods.

The goal of this paper is to compare alpine communes with varying forms and intensities of recreational and tourism development in order to identify how recreational values shape local actors' perceptions of alpine forests (inferring expressed forest related conflicts and values) and local actors' strategies of action, when participating in the management of these forests.

Based on research about local actors' participation in forestry in Alpine communes (Finger-Stich 2005), it seems that tourism development can induce local actors' disinterest in taking part in communal forestry. Based on a sample of six case studies of six alpine communes in the French (Haute-Savoie) and Swiss (cantons of Vaud and Valais) Alps, the results show that local actors' participation in communal forestry tends to decline with

the development of their commune's tourism sector. More precisely, this withdrawal in local actors' engagement is manifested in:

- Decreased municipal investment in the local forest
- Forest management delegated to the forest service
- Forest workers from private and community enterprises marginalized (economically and in their representation in local governance structures)
- Use conflicts between the agriculture and forestry sectors relatively high and unsolved.

The baseline study shows that resource as well as patrimonial, recreation and conservation values related with the local forest tend to be more often expressed by rural communities developing low impact recreation services, than by local actors residing in communes that have developed high impact tourism and recreational activities (skiing in particular).

Beyond the analysis of forest perceptions, the baseline study (Finger-Stich 2005) identifies the actors and places (communes) where collective social interactions promote more quality of life values (including patrimonial, recreational and conservation related forest values) and which aim more at enhancing livelihood or production functions of forests (i.e. the production of timber and fuelwood, the sustaining of forest related jobs and revenues). It distinguishes social interaction processes according to their capacity to more or less reproduce

resource management structures or change them. By differentiating results according to the types of actors interviewed, the analysis indicates that local actors working in tourism and involved in local governance, often try to integrate both livelihood and quality of life interests and are therefore key players fostering more multi-functional forestry. Multi-functional forestry being constitutive of definitions of “sustainable forestry”, in mountain regions in particular (OEFM 2000), an enhanced participation of the tourism sector in alpine forestry could be considered as conducive to sustainable alpine forestry.

## Methods

The present contribution focuses the analysis of the baseline study on the question of how tourism and recreational interests shape local actors' perceptions and involvement in collective actions related with communal forest management. It also inquires into an additional sample of alpine communes taking part in the elaboration of a Forest Charter in Haute-Savoie. The base-line research is based on social action theories and methodologies (Crozier & Friedberg 1977, Giddens 1987), on qualitative interview methods (open-ended and semi-structured) and on a grounded theory approach for analysing the data (Glaser 1992). Local actors' perceptions of forest values and conflicts were induced through a systematic and comparative text analysis, and so were the 21 collective actions identified in the initial sample of 6 communes. The dataset includes over 100 interviews conducted with local actors of various occupation, gender and age encountered in the communes, where the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors have more or less impact on local land uses and where geographic, demographic and accessibility conditions vary (Bätzing 1993).

## Results

The addition proposed by the present paper is to further discuss these results by focusing on recreational related conflicts and values and then challenges them by looking at an enlarged sample of communes. Indeed, preliminary research in a new sample of alpine communes indicates that some

communes that have invested in quite massive forms of winter and summer tourism development can also develop a dynamic communal forestry capacity by, for example:

- Valuing local forests as a resource for bio-energy (investment in communal fuelwood-run heating facility, etc.)
- Investing in local forest management planning, for instance, by developing a territorial Forest Charter
- Transmitting and upgrading local forestry know-how, forestry training for forest owners, organization of Forest Fairs, etc.
- Collection of taxes on overnights and recreational activities reinvested in local forestry.

## Conclusion

In a context of increasing forest related recreational values and decreasing financial and institutional capacities of forestry administrations (observed in Swiss and French alpine regions in particular), the paper helps forest and recreation managers consider local communities' recreational interests in relation with local forestry and to engage them accordingly in the management of their forests.

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