

Evaluation of the Promotion of Infrastructure by Regional, Tourism and Transport Policy

A case study from the Visp-Saastal region (CH)

General Background

Regional development in the Swiss Alps meets specific challenges such as difficult natural pre-conditions, less accessibility of regions, limited income possibilities for the local population and migration from peripheral regions. Since 30 years mountain regions are supported by Swiss regional policy. Furthermore, financial support is provided for projects of sustainable tourism and transport policy aims at the shift towards railway transportation. In this context the new Lötschberg base tunnel as part of the New European Alpine Transit (NEAT) will open in 2007.

Project Aim and Study Area

The paper will present the results of my PhD thesis "Evaluation of Infrastructure Promotion by Regional, Tourism and Transport Policy". Supposing that policy has a strong influence on accessibility of regions, their socio-economic development and their environment the study aims at the evaluation of relevance, coherence and impacts of the relevant Swiss policies. The region Visp-Saastal (Canton Valais) serves as the study area and is finally compared to the development in Switzerland and in the Alps as a whole.

Applied Methods and Data

The complexity of political strategies and their implementation make it necessary to use the methodological triangulation (FLICK 2000). Based on an impact model and relevant indicators the impacts of regional, tourism, and transport policy on regional development are assessed. For this purpose, necessary information is derived from literature and statistical data analysis (quantitative data 1970-2000). These sources are supplemented by interviews with experts from the federal and cantonal administration as well as transport enterprises and tourism organisations (qualitative data).

Results

The paper will address the following main issues:

- Infrastructure is supported by financial instruments of different Swiss policies. Within the last 30 years the investment aid for mountain areas in regional policy financed inter alia transport and tourism infrastructure. At present several large infrastructure projects are financed by specific funds, e.g. NEAT projects.
- The improvement of accessibility by infrastructure promotion hinders the further migration from rural areas, supports new economic activities, and thereby contributes indirectly to the maintenance of these regions and their environment by the local population. However, the upgrading of infrastructure affects cultural landscape, increases land use conflicts and fragmentation, and often destroys the natural resources for a sustainable development.
- For a sustainable development of regions the impacts of infrastructure promotion and its interrelations with other policies must be considered. Therefore scopes of action for decision makers on local, regional, and national level will be identified, recommendations derived and examples of good practice presented.

Future Prospects

The opening of the Lötschberg base tunnel in 2007 leads to high expectations regarding regional development in the Visp-Saastal region. First ideas for future research will be presented with the aim to evaluate the impacts of NEAT in the region.

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