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Ecoregional mobilization and mountain policies in Switzerland and California

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Abstract: Mountain regions have occupied a significant role in the political evolution, economic history, and sociocultural imaginary of Switzerland and California, yet the emergence of the modern state and the global economy have meant their increasing marginalization. During the last four decades, both polities have devised targeted strategies, policies, and programs for mountain regions. This article suggests that ecoregional mobilization has played a significant role in shaping the nature and evolution of these policies. Expanding and specifying arguments found in the policy networks literature, it argues that changes in the nature of dynamics of ‘organizational landscapes’ (the assemblage of state and non-state actors sha-

ring a common concern for a policy issue or set of issues) precipitate transformations in ‘policy architectures, (the structure and substantive orientation of public policy goals and instruments). Applying this framework to developments in the Swiss Alps and California’s Sierra Nevada during the last forty years, the article explains how ecoregional mobilization shaped opposite trends in the mountain areas, namely a shift from infrastructure development to nature conservation in the Alps, and a shift from nature conservation to local economic development in the Sierra Nevada.

Keywords: Swiss Alps, Sierra Nevada, Ecoregional mobilization, Regional policy.

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Mountain regions have occupied a significant role in the political evolution, economic history, and sociocultural imaginary of Switzerland and California, yet the emergence of the modern state and the global economy have meant their increasing marginalization. During the last four decades, both polities have devised targeted strategies, policies, and programs for mountain regions. These efforts have been guided by the notion that generating social capital through fostering and then scaling up inter-communal and intra-regional cooperation would generate self-sustaining growth. Accordingly, government initiatives such as regional policies have frequently aimed at the controlled mobilization of mountain-based state and non-state actor networks to promote growth and innovation.

In this article I examine the relationship between ecoregional mobilization (as a form of organizational development) and public policies. In both Switzerland and California, mobilization at the mountain regional scale produced an organizational environment that shaped public policies decisively, albeit in different ways at different times. While

range wide - civil society groups focusing on agriculture and socioeconomic development shaped Swiss mountain policies from the 1970s, networks of environmental NGOs shaped conservationist federal and state policies toward the Sierra Nevada from the 1990s. Emerging public policies in turn enabled and constrained continuing mobilization, eventually producing a marked difference in the recent evolution of the two mountain policies in the form of a political turn toward conservation in the Alps and toward socioeconomic development in the Sierra Nevada.

The relationship between public policies and ecoregional mobilization has important implications for current debates surrounding a new vision of spatial development in Switzerland for two reasons. The case studies examined in this article show that since regional policies do not emerge in a vacuum, their design has to take prevailing conditions into account. Among these has been a gradually consolidating trend towards ecoregional mobilization. As a consequence, a mismatch between policy goals and prevailing organizational manifestations undermines legitimacy from the start. The two case studies also demonstrate the result of a mismatch in terms of conflict. In California, an enormous amount of resources and public goodwill were lost due to judicial acrimony over a mountain policy that failed to respond to ecoregional mobilizers' concerns. In Switzerland, the prolonged exclusion of environmental concerns from regional policy left regional policy at the mercy of changing economic priorities, which have now further marginalized mountain areas to the point where conservation remains one of the few viable options.

Regional policies in Switzerland and California

Prior to the development of regional policies for the Swiss Alps and California's Sierra Nevada, the two mountain ranges had to be constructed as mountain ranges in terms that made them amenable to regional policy making. Both ranges have played important roles in the emergence and development of the two polities, as sources of natural wealth, as places of residence, work and play, and as cultural symbols in state and nation building processes; however, the respective mountain 'problematicues' were of more recent making (Beesley, 2004; Bätzing, 2003). In Switzerland, differences in physical and human endowments between mountain and lowland areas became a policy problem when post-World War II economic growth rapidly increased regional economic disparity and led to outmigration from mountain areas (Frey, 2008). California's policy debates following World War II witnessed no such equivalent, even though economic growth occurred disproportionately in coastal cities. When conditions in the Sierra Nevada did become recognized as a problem in the late 1980s, the circumstances were not shaped by regional economic disparity but by environmental degradation. During the last fifteen years, a marked difference between policies for the two mountain regions emerged as they evolved in opposite directions. In Switzerland, the recent expansion of regional policy to metropolitan areas and the rush to create parks illustrates a conservationist turn, while the reorientation of conservationist approaches in the Sierra Nevada to focus on the livelihoods of local communities shows a departure from past conflicts between timber harvesting and endangered species conservation.

Targeted approaches to alleviating regional problems can take a variety of different forms, including regional differentiation of sectoral policies, fiscal equalization among regional (often federal) units, regionally differentiated public service provision, and explicit regional policy. The Swiss and Californian (U.S.) governments have used all four, albeit in different combinations. In Switzerland, regionally differentiated policies were applied to the country's Alpine forests in the late 1800s and to mountain agriculture from the 1920s. The 1959 Law on Fiscal Equalization created a system of inter-cantonal redistribution of public funds, following a complex formula derived, alongside fiscal indicators, from a canton's territorial share of mountain areas. Regionally differentiated public service provision has sometimes involved the siting of employment in public enterprises in mountain areas. In California (and the US more generally), regional policies have a long history but are much less pronounced (Markusen 1985). Federal forest and nature conservation policy is sometimes argued to be regional because it mostly applies to mountain areas in the country's West. Some tools of fiscal federalism are used in forestry and public sector jobs have sometimes been targeted regionally, especially in the country's South.

The cornerstones of Swiss and Californian approaches to their mountain areas have been explicit regional policies, albeit of very different orientation. In Switzerland, parliamentary motions submitted by prominent members from mountain cantons led to a series of strategic assessments which in turn culminated in the 1974 Federal Law on Investment Assistance to Mountain Regions (IHG). In return for the establishment of intercommunal institutions and the development of socio-economic development strategies, the IHG law offered low interest loans for basic infrastructure. Additional regional instruments primarily benefiting the country's mountain areas evolved around loan assistance for tourism establishments, interest payment assistance and loan guarantees for businesses, and residential improvements. Although these policies were enacted after the country's first pieces of environmental legislation were put in place, Switzerland's mountain policies were conspicuously devoid of any environmental objectives.

Following extensive reviews and political discussions during the 1980s and early 1990s, the first generation of regional policy tools was complemented in the mid-1990s by programs designed to replace the original Keynesian spirit with a focus on endogenous growth, regional competition, and innovation. The regional policy reform wave concluded in 2005 with the consolidation of all previous mountain policies into a new regional policy with a countrywide spatial focus, the firm anchoring of post-Keynesian principles, and the transfer of policy aims for reducing regional disparity to a new law on fiscal equalization (Frey, 2008).

Explicit regional policies for the Sierra Nevada emerged in the 1990s. Their focus gradually broadened from endangered species conservation to forest management and from the turn of the century to socioeconomic development. Hence, in contrast to Switzerland's mountain problematique, which was attributed to uneven economic development, California's was decidedly conservationist. The debilitating struggle over spotted owl protection in the Pacific Northwest forced the U.S. Forest Service to try to preempt a similar trend in the Sierra Nevada, which is home to a related owl species. The

resulting California Spotted Owl Guidelines signaled for the first time that the mountain range was more than a separate collection of national forest units. In the early 1990s, the Pulitzer-price winning series “Sierra in peril” by Tom Knudsen, as well as the conclusions of a large-scale assessment of the Sierra Nevada’s ecological plight, painted an even broader picture of environmental degradation in John Muir’s Range of Light.

In response, the Forest Service scaled up its regional efforts under the auspices of the Sierra Nevada Framework, a comprehensive, collaborative planning instrument for all national forests in the range. After the outgoing Clinton Administration managed to rally all key actors behind a draft Framework, however, the change of guard in the White House led the new regional forester to initiate an extensive overhaul of the draft. Environmental organizations promptly took their opposition to the courts, both in relation to ongoing timber harvesting projects and the new overarching policy framework in general. These groups increasingly enjoyed the support of the state of California, especially the Resources Agency and the State Attorney, which had persistently but largely unsuccessfully lobbied the Forest Service to place natural resource management into a broader socioeconomic context.

The most recent chapter in mountain policy development for the Sierra Nevada entailed the establishment in 2004 of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a policy designed to mobilize regionally targeted public investment. Although the California government had previously created such conservancies, they focused almost exclusively on land acquisition for conservation purposes. By contrast, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy has adopted a much broader mandate, including local livelihood improvement strategies for resource-dependent communities.

Ecoregional mobilization in the Swiss Alps and the Sierra Nevada

Ecoregional mobilization evokes diverse and intricate social processes at multiple spatial and temporal scales. In pluralist societies, myriad place making practices co-exist and interrelate at any point in time as new places are constantly produced, contested, appropriated, celebrated, and sometimes interred. This makes the identification of cause-and-effect relations a challenging task. Yet strong scholarly traditions continue to assume a unidirectional influence of policies on organizations. Most textbook approaches to policy making, for instance, suggest a linear progression from the formulation of policy goals to the organization of their implementation, a model that has been widely influential in policy sciences and management studies (e.g. Easton, 1957; Hall & Saias, 1980).

Political scientists advocating a policy networks approach have proposed an alternative view, which suggests that the nature and structure of actor relations influence policy outcomes (Knoke, 1990; Kriesi, 1980; Marsh & Rhodes, 1992). This perspective has become a prominent theoretical argument and produced a plethora of terms including whirlpools, iron triangles, issue networks, policy communities, and advocacy coalitions to denote the empirical phenomena under study. The policy networks literature has become quite diverse, differing in the importance attached to personal versus structural

links between network actors, the focus on legislative versus broader interorganizational dynamics, and the emphasis on norms versus strategic action. What joins the diverse strands together, however, is the argument that changes in the constellation and dynamics of collective actors, or 'organizational landscapes,' precipitate transformations in the ensemble of public policies, or 'policy architectures' (Balsiger, 2007). An organizational landscape is defined as the totality of public, private, and non-governmental actors at different levels with a common concern for a policy issue or set of issues; a policy architecture is defined as the relational structure and substantive orientation of a set of public policy goals and instruments.

The impetus for change in organizational landscapes can originate from the emergence of new or, more rarely, the disappearance of existing organizations, changing material or technological resource endowments and distributions, or shifting social concerns vis-à-vis specific issues. Importantly, the potential for such changes is not limited to any singular type of public, private, or non-governmental organization. Ecoregional mobilization as understood and illustrated in this article can involve non-governmental actors such as the Swiss Working Group for Mountain Areas or the Sierra Nevada Alliance, or public actors such as Switzerland's Parliamentary Group for Mountain Populations. According to the policy networks literature, any such change will translate into a reorientation of public policies. In other words, the unidirectional causality inherent in classic policy cycle models needs to be considered from the opposite direction as well (e.g. Marsh & Smith, 2000).

In this article, I argue that ecoregional mobilization as witnessed in the Alps and the Sierra Nevada constitutes a change in the organizational landscape and thereby a determining factor in the transformation of mountain policy architectures in Switzerland and California. Ecoregional mobilization preceded and thereby significantly influenced the nature of regional policies in both cases. Moreover, the two case studies reveal the consequences of failing to incorporate important dimensions of an organizational landscape (the environmental movement in Switzerland and local economic development movements in California) into an emerging policy architecture. In the Sierra Nevada, ecoregional mobilization led to prolonged litigation over forest management; in Switzerland, it produced a regional policy framework that gave almost no consideration to environmental sustainability.

Organizational landscapes can vary along a number of dimensions, including the locus and diversity of discursive power, substantive emphasis and scope, degree of internal conflict, and extent of regional segmentation (Balsiger, 2007). Variation in these four variables and how they are related help explain the different dynamics of mountain policy development in Switzerland and California. This gives rise to four expected trends with respect to ecoregional mobilization. First, ecoregional mobilization produces shifts in the locus of discursive power: from the Federal Office for Agriculture to the Federal Office of Spatial Development and environmental NGOs in Switzerland, and from the U.S. Forest Service to the land trust movement in the Sierra Nevada. Second, ecoregional mobilization precipitates substantive changes in mountain policy: from infrastructure development to conservation in Switzerland, and from forestry and species conservation to livelihood concerns of resource-dependent communities in the Sierra

Nevada. Third, ecoregional mobilization shapes conflict potentials and, hence, policy development: the absence of marked conflict in Switzerland's mountain policy architecture created both stability and a smoother transition, while extensive litigation over Sierra Nevada forestry and species conservation produced abrupt policy changes. And fourth, almost by definition, ecoregional mobilization suggests regional segmentation: in both Switzerland and California, regionalized organizational landscapes have served to highlight how broader public policy debates matter to mountain constituencies.

An organizational landscape's locus of discursive power can be situated along a public-private continuum, which has important bearings on how mountain problems are interpreted. Organizational landscapes heavily dominated by public agencies are generally more likely to produce formalized policy approaches because an agency's span of control is mandated by legislation. This span determines what conditions are monitored, what thresholds drive the transformation of trends into policy problems, and what policy tools can be employed.

In Switzerland, the locus of discursive control over mountain policies initially rested with the agricultural administration but shifted to the Federal Office of Industry, Trade, and Labor (later State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) when the mountain problematique became defined as one of economic disparity. With the support of a range of public-private partnerships – non-governmental organizations that count cantons and municipalities among their members – joined by their interest in local economic development, as well as selected influential academics, this view survived almost unchallenged from the 1960s to the 1990s, when the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, the Federal Office of Spatial Planning, and environmental NGOs assumed a much greater role. In California, views of and engagement with the Sierra Nevada were initially dominated by the Forest Service, as the spatial extent and organization of the national forest system reigned the territorial landscape. In contrast to Switzerland, however, California's organizational landscape was clearly demarcated between the Forest Service and environmental NGOs until well into the 1990s. To a significant degree, the evolution of Sierra Nevada policy is the story of the Forest Service's unraveling (Beesley, 2004).

The substantive emphasis and scope of an organizational landscape is closely related to, yet analytically distinct from its locus of discursive power. As discursive power holders largely operate on the basis of a logic of appropriateness, an organizational landscape's scope and emphasis more or less closely matches the breadth of a power holder's institutional mandate. Since government agencies typically lack the ability to dramatically change their mandate, scope and emphasis tend to remain stable for long periods of time. By contrast, non-governmental organizations and the private sector are more capable of shifting their organizational mission in order to adapt to new priorities or constituencies. For this reason, the degree of non-governmental participation in discursive power sharing helps determine the stability of a given policy regime, which helps explain the relatively slower pace of change witnessed in Switzerland than in California.

In Switzerland, the precursor of an organizational landscape in mountain development

that emerged in the 1930s was heavily focused on agriculture, driven by the close alliance between the Farmer, Trade and Citizen Party (the predecessor of the Swiss People's Party) and the Swiss Farmers' Association. After World War II, the substantive scope broadened and the emphasis gradually shifted to socioeconomic development in the 1970s, even though regional differentiation in agricultural policy continued and even expanded. Importantly, the organizational landscape lacked representation of environmental interests, even though environmental and cultural heritage preservation organizations openly opposed numerous projects implemented with financial assistance from mountain policies, especially in the area of tourism development. An environmental outlook did not unfold until environmental NGOs launched their parks campaign in the 1990s and regional policy reform advocates suggested that mountain areas focus on conservation and soft tourism development. Conversely, the organizational landscape of the Sierra Nevada was focused on forestry and species conservation in the 1980s and 1990s. Starting in the mid-1990s, the emphasis and scope changed to encompass a broader range of practices, including many that cut across economic sectors through a focus on watersheds or working landscapes.

A third dimension of variability relates to the degree of conflict among organizational landscape members. Degree of conflict can relate to a range of dimensions and influences policy development in ways that are often contingent on other contextual factors. Generally, a high degree of conflict helps reveal alternative policy options; however, policy development becomes a difficult task and may become constant subject to political and/or legal challenges. The relative absence of conflict may signal either a policy orientation that is so narrow (or inconsequential) that it fails to affect potential opponents, or that sufficient consensus indeed prevails. In Switzerland, mountain policies began to change during the 1990s in the relative absence of conflict. The reorientation was carried out against the background of a global recession and the general sense that Keynesian policies needed updating, a perspective that was additionally influential because it was shared by the European Union. In the Sierra Nevada, on the other hand, forest policy during the 1980s and 1990s became so contentious that persistent court challenges against the Forest Service and other federal land management agencies undermined regional natural resource management initiatives such as the Sierra Nevada Framework. Significantly, this conflict motivated other actors to seek alternative approaches and nudge the mountain policies in a new direction. The degree of conflict is thus not an unambiguous predictor of policy change but contingent on other contextual factors.

Finally, organizational landscapes differ in the nature and extent of regional segmentation among government agencies, legislatures, local authorities, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations; although ecoregional mobilization could be used as a synonym, its activist connotation is more typically associated with non-governmental organizations than with public actors. Regional segmentation is closely related to the locus of discursive power because regionally differentiated organizational structures act as important lenses through which more generalized problems are refracted. Regional organizations reinforce the role of such lenses because they tend to communicate the significance of policy issues in terms of how policy repercussions matter to regional constituents.

In Switzerland, the regionalization of the organizational landscape preceding mountain policy development assumed different forms. As it came to encompass mountain constituencies in federal and cantonal executives and legislatures, as well as a series of instrumental non-state actors, it slowly transcended public and private domains and in many cases involved hybrid arrangements that served as critical links between the state and civil society. Mountain specific executive and legislative forums such as the Parliamentary Group for Mountain Populations were already formed before World War II, first as venues of information exchange but increasingly as sites of political mobilization and sources of political leverage. More importantly a large number of regionally specific non-state and parastatal organizations emerged in support of mountain regions, often created at the suggestion of parliament. Some of these, like the Swiss Working Group for Mountain Regions and Mountain Aid were created in the 1940s and initially had a strong agricultural orientation. Others were founded as regional development associations with a special interest in mountain regions. The most powerful among them, Swiss Working Group for Mountain Farmers, was established in 1943. Environmental organizations were all but absent from the regional policy dialog during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; local chapters in mountain areas had long been in existence, but the large environmental organizations WWF and Pro Natura did not establish alpine programs until the late 1990s.

In California, the lion share of regional segmentation occurred in the nongovernmental sector. Indeed, in marked contrast to Switzerland the Sierra Nevada region did not assume a special role in executive and legislative work, nor among state agencies. In the early 1990s, a series of conferences triggered the establishment of regional non-governmental organizations, most prominently the Sierra Nevada Alliance (SNA) and a few years later the Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign (SNFPC), both established with the financial support of private foundations and both professing a strong conservationist orientation. These alliances consisted of a large number of previously existing but largely unconnected volunteer-driven groups. Due to the narrow membership base, however, both SNA and SNFPC during their early years failed to build bridges to those whose livelihoods were tied to the economic health of natural resource industries. Local livelihood concerns became the organizational domain of a second type of non-governmental organization, represented most famously by the Sierra Business Council. Similar to SNA and SNFPC, SBC was founded with the objective of protecting the natural resources of the mountain range, yet the way it pursued this goal was dramatically different from the first two. Whereas SNA and SNFPC mobilized their membership among environmental groups, SBC approached businesses, primarily in Placer and Nevada counties, and convinced them that their economic future depended on the health of the mountain's ecosystems. As a consequence, when regional forest planning became deadlocked in the early 2000s, SBC's vision increasingly came to be seen as an alternative model of regional development, one that has also been espoused by local planning initiatives involving watershed councils and local land trusts. SBC proved to be instrumental in the transition of the Sierra Nevada's policy domain from an almost exclusive forest and endangered species conservation focus to something more akin to sustainable mountain development.

This overview of the organizational landscapes in Switzerland and California has shown

that the nature, substantive emphasis and scope, degree of conflict, and regional segmentation of organizational landscapes not only shaped emerging mountain policy architectures, they also influenced their evolution. In producing the marked difference between recent trends in policies for the Swiss Alps (toward conservation) and the Sierra Nevada (toward local economic livelihoods), ecoregional mobilization at the scale of the two mountain ranges played a determining role.

Conclusion

The argument I have advanced in this article suggests that ecoregional mobilization in the Swiss Alps and the Sierra Nevada has played a decisive role in the unfolding of mountain policies for the two ranges. Through an examination of the respective organizational landscapes' nature, substantive scope and emphasis, degree of conflict, and regional segmentation, I have illustrated that the architecture of mountain policies in Switzerland and California have been shaped in important ways by the interorganizational constellations in which they emerged and evolved. Over time, moreover, changing interorganizational relations have produced alternative problem interpretations and thereby driven policy reform. During the last fifteen years, California's initially forest-focused, conflict-ridden approach to the Sierra Nevada has been transformed into a more collaborative and more comprehensively sustainable development oriented mountain policy. In Switzerland, an almost purely economic development policy for mountain regions has gradually become more inclusive of environmental concerns.

The utility of a policy networks-inspired theoretical approach for explaining how organizational landscapes influence policy architectures has been illustrated through an examination of only two case studies. Switzerland and California share important features, including a federal political system, the extensive use of direct democratic instruments such as initiatives and referendums, and a history of regional development policies (not just for mountain areas). These features suggest a limited generalizability of the findings. In more unitary and centralized states, for instance, ecoregional mobilization may take quite different forms and prompt quite different government responses. Testing the wider applicability of the theoretical suggestions concerning ecoregional mobilization presented in this article will therefore require more empirical work in the future.

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