

How tourism impacts the Swiss mountains

As an alpine country, Switzerland is a well-known and popular ski destination at a national and international level. Millions of people annually flock to the Swiss ski resorts (Mueller et al., 2020), which have engraved themselves on the landscape of the Swiss mountains today. That this was not always the case is self-evident, but that it is so - seems worrying to some.

Questions arise; about the sense and nonsense of ski resorts, the use and degradation of natural spaces, and about the future of the mountain landscape as we know it.

In many Swiss valleys, cable cars are primarily responsible for transporting people. They bring people into alpine natural spaces to pursue leisure activities. In large ski resorts, thousands of people quickly flock to the mountains every day and use several lifts (Mueller et al., 2020).

These lifts not only consume a lot of electricity, but also fill the alpine landscape with countless structures. In addition to the lifts, slopes are levelled, trees felled, or streams straightened to make the slopes as safe and efficient as possible. Artificial snow is used to artificially prolong the ever-shorter ski season.

In Switzerland, with around 250 ski resorts, i.e., 7000 km of slopes, this is a significantly large natural area, which is further extended by 5000 km of cross-country ski trails and other winter sports activities, which are subject to anthropogenic geomorphological change (Radford, Senn & Kienast 2019).

Thanks to the good transport infrastructure, one can quickly find one's way to the natural paradise of the Alps. But those who dream of untouched nature must search in vain. Not least because of the large expansion of ski resorts, there is very little wilderness left (Radford, Senn & Kienast 2019). Wouldn't it be time for a rethink in winter tourism?

At least that is the opinion of the Alpine conservation organisation Mountain Wilderness (Mountain Wilderness, n. d.). It campaigns for an intact mountain landscape and environmentally compatible mountain sports. So we too cannot avoid the question: What next?



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What tourism means to Swiss mountain regions

Alongside the beauty of Swiss mountain regions, skiing, and hiking leads to a lot of tourism. Linked to that there is a big chance for economic upswing in secluded parts of Switzerland (Bonadonna et al., 2017).

Often this chance leads to big skiing regions with lot of infrastructure. When tourists jump on the train, the whole region can get a big boost. Hotels, restaurants, and shops get a lot more visitors and the whole infrastructure of the region can be improved (Leimgruber 2021).

But on the other side, if it doesn't work how planned, there is a big danger for empty ski resorts which also leads to empty hotels and a run-down region (Leimgruber 2021).

To conclude, tourism is a big chance for mountain regions and the whole economy in these parts of Switzerland. But it must be planned and executed well, otherwise it could blow up into their faces.

Our Experiences

As two Swiss kids, we grew up next to mountain regions. Going skiing and hiking several times a year and seeing the beauty of snow-covered mountains from the lowlands, shaped our childhood.

But to be precise, we especially had the chance to visit these regions thanks to tourism, which brings us on ski slopes and hiking trails. Without any infrastructure, ski lifts and mountain lodges, we wouldn't have been able to participate these beautiful activities in our childhood. So, we can say that most of the mountain activities in which we participated earlier are linked to tourism.

But the climate change and the awareness about the dangers leads to a rethinking on our side. Away from touristic skiing and hiking towards ski touring and hiking with tents in less explored regions.

Sources

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